EL TORO

A MOTOR CAR STORY OF INTERIOR CUBA

TORO

By
E. RALPH

DETROIT
PACKARD MOTOR CAR COMPANY
1909

*"Many of the mountain passes were so narrow * * * that we were forced to run with one wheel on a sloping side wall and the other on the crest of the deepest rut."*

SEE PAGE 78.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

OCCASIONALLY business has experiences which are interesting on their own account. To set them down in words is an agreeable task and entirely different from the making of business literature of the familiar kinds. This narrative is just the relation of what happened, when, on other business bent, we strayed into the unknown and stayed to have a motoring experience, which was far enough from the conventional to deserve a place in the realm of adventure. The tale is here recounted in the hope that it will possess for others a degree of the interest which, for ourselves, has made it a substantial part of our recollections. Most of all, ye unworthy scribe hopes that the narration will be acceptable to those who made it possible — to Sidney D. Waldon, father of the great idea and leading spirit of the enterprise resulting therefrom, Edwin S. George, Fred Crebbin and Rogelio Gaarken.

E. R. E.

Detroit, April, 1909.

CHAPTER I

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"Once in a while a good sort of winding dirt road gave promise of speed."

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CHAPTER I

Direct not him, whose way himself will choose;
'Tis breath thou lack'st, and that breath wilt thou lose.
— Richard II.

RED and vivid against the dense night, a camp fire of palm bark flared, fluttered, and went out. Its momentary glare illumined one of those strange scenes, occasioned by strange people being marooned in a strange place. The rest of the world, which seemed very far away, was shut out, on the one side, by a reef of palm trees sharply silhouetted against the somber sky and, on the other, by a barrier of hills.

"Are we up against it?" Crebbin spoke.

"If you mean by 'it' that hill yonder, we are." Waldon answered.

Three jaded men sat around the fire. Like the fire, their conversation had flamed and gone out. They gazed into the darkening embers, mused on the strangeness of some things and speculated on

the final solution of the problem which was theirs by reason of their present whereabouts. A palm tree, which had never before enjoyed the company of a four-wheeled vehicle, stood sentinel over an automobile, from whose tonneau protruded the feet of a folded and, presumably, sleeping figure. On a bed of brush slumbered the only one of the party who was native to the country and thereby accustomed to its lack of things comfortable. The others had abandoned this bed on which they could not sleep, had scoured the unfamiliar woods for fuel and had amused themselves by keeping an unnecessary fire ablaze, for the mere companionship of its warmth and for its light, which drove away the trepidation of loneliness. There was no noise, except the strange sounds from the underbrush and palm forests.

The strangers were ourselves. The native was our interpreter.

We were thirty miles from Havana, Cuba. In our sleepy thoughts, Cuba was a mighty big place, Havana far away and our own homes as distant and chimerical as the moon. The moon did not shine on that part of Cuba that night. We were a discouraged bunch, with only a few stars on which to hang our sense of location. Our hopes were in cold storage. We marveled at the wildness of a land that was figuratively but a few steps from the gay and careless Havana. We laughed hysterically at the recollection of our day's performance in bringing the car over the roadless country whose stone trails are followed only by ox carts and ponies.

Remembering we were bound across the island to one of the oldest of its very old towns, we realized that, when dawn should raise the curtain on the scene night had shut out, we would be almost up against the impossible. However, we did not seek to pry into the future. We simply tried to neglect it. We were not sure where we were and we did not care very much, because it made no difference. It was just about as hard to get into and out of one place as another. We had learned much about Cuba in a few hours.

We imitated sleep with apathy. Occasionally, we tried to bring the real world back to us, by noisily gathering more fallen palm bark for the fire. Palm bark makes a poor fire for the cheering of lonely spirits. It is a fickle stimulant, the effect being great while it lasts, but it does not last long enough to give any real comfort. The dead, dark, cold night was depressing.

We were startled like children when the thundering of near-by hoofs awoke us to the fact that we were no longer alone. The insurgents were busy in Cuba just then and we had not been there long enough to learn that Cuba and insurgents are not bad, but just naughty. The disturbers were as surprised as we. One was a country doctor who was riding miles to visit a stricken "spiggotie" in some distant hut.

A spiggotie is any kind of a provincial Cuban, when mentioned by an outsider. He is one of that species of uncertain race which populates the Spanish-American countries and makes it difficult for a visitor to draw a color line between negro

and Castillian blood. I have also met spiggoties who were a charming mixture of Spanish, negro, and Chinese.

The doctor looked down from his pony at us in wonder. His servant on the other pony was alarmed. Presumably, he never had seen an automobile before. Having lived in the midst of three or four puny wars and one real one, he showed the common spiggotie attitude of being suspicious of everything that was not Cuban and regular. The doctor gave us the customary "que hay," and we awakened the interpreter to say it back to him.

A Cuban does not say much, but he uses a lot of words on the job and is willing to put a highly dramatic touch to the most trivial question or remark. Our interpreter was fully impressed with the honor of being a part of the first automobile expedition across the rough provinces of Cuba. The rattle of Spanish was like two kettle drums in action together.

Evidently, the doctor asked all that could be asked and the interpreter told him more about us than we could have told him. We tried to break into the conversation, but the interpreter was disposed to consider our assistance as a hindrance. We pried one unconsoling fact out of him. The doctor thought we were more than right in supposing we might be up against it. He named about a hundred rivers and a thousand hills which were impassable. He explained that the trail we were following did not lead anywhere, that there was no trail which led anywhere and

that there was no road which could be followed. He said that we would have to go back. Then he said that we could not go back. That we had come this far seemed only to impress him with the fact that we must have dropped out of a cloud or come in an airship. It was certainly impossible to make him believe we had driven an automobile from Havana.

Thirty miles is a short distance for an automobile in some places. Between Philadelphia and New York it is a matter of thirty minutes. It had been a matter of five or six hours with us, there in Cuba. We were glad to have the doctor go on his way, for we had heard enough about deep rivers, steep hills, walls of rock, and crooked gullies. We wanted to think about something else until daylight. At least we had rather think about what had been than what was to come. It seemed strange that so much could have happened in the last twenty-four hours.

There was an element of humor in our plight, but we were not in a humorous mood. There was great beauty in the wild, dark night for those who were used to the quiet, homespun nights of Wayne County, Michigan. We knew that we were missing the enchantment of the hour, but we were not in the mood to mind missing anything.

We were the victims of our own imagination rather than the victims of circumstances. We had imagined that Cuba was a sort of national park with an immense system of boulevards. There is one magnificent highway in Cuba, fifty-two

miles long, which reaches from Havana to San Cristobal. In publicity it reaches around the world. It has been the course of automobile road races. Automobile writers, attending said automobile races, wrote columns about the beautiful Cubaland, in which the wandering motorist from the north may drive as fast as he likes, while balmy breezes blow across the palm-sentineled macadam. The government has started a road from Havana eastward across the island. Some of this has been surveyed, a little of it graded and it actually exists for a half-dozen miles out of Havana. Down in Santiago province, General Wood has built a road or two. The middle of the island is roadless. There is no continuous travel by vehicle.

Havana presents a wrong idea of Cuba. It is a tourists' town. It has boulevards and carriages. Cuba has wandering trails and ox carts. No four-wheeled vehicle is used outside the towns. Probably no vehicle of any kind, unless in time of war, ever has made a continuous journey across the island. The ox carts are for local travel. Cross country travel is on foot or on ponies.

Yesterday, on the little coast steamer which carried us across the gulf, we had discussed with eager expectance the fascinations of touring in Cuba, as presented in the steamship company's alluring pamphlets. We had come south with a Packard car to run it fast and furiously for thousands and thousands of miles under hot weather conditions. A Cuban on the steamer listened while we recounted our plans for this great try-

ing out of the speed and endurance of our motor car. He asked us:

"Have you ever been in Cuba?" and, upon our negative reply:

"Do you really think you can drive an automobile through the interior of Cuba?"

We assured him that we could drive one anywhere, but he merely laughed and sauntered away to tell the other passengers what seemed to him to be a funny story. Other Cubans talked to us. They were all iconoclasts and some of them were plain "knockers." At first we were insulted and then our peace of mind was destroyed. Slowly, but surely, we approached the truth. Everywhere we turned for a reassuring opinion concerning the suppositious highways, we got the same answer:

"There are no roads; you can't do it."

They all explained the impossibility of traversing its valley lands and mountain regions, of making even a most laborious way across the arroyos, through the bridgeless rivers, over the barren stone, and in the wide swamps. There are roads on the map. The maps were originally made by Spaniards with a greater regard for neat drafting than the truth. It is hard to find those roads on the earth. Their course occasionally is marked by washouts.

We slept on the information but gained nothing. This day we had left our cabins early, to catch the first morning glimpse of the beautiful harbor of Havana. As we looked upon its blue shores, under the bluer sky, and felt the charm

of early southern morn, it seemed impossible that such a most excellent place to come to could be without roads leading from one beauty spot to another.

The original Cuban came along with a parting slam at our hopes. We were saved from developing a streak of yellow by being carried to a close view of the sunken "Maine." While our little ship was at anchor, waiting for the tender to land its passengers, we surveyed that unprecedented monument resting in the middle of Havana harbor and our American blood created a stubborn desire to conquer Cuba, roads or no roads, if it took all the gasoline in the world and all the tires in Akron, Ohio.

We were whisked from dreamland into the confusion of the custom-house. Meekly as possible, we suffered the high-handed tactics of the revenue officers. These new Cuban officials, who used to be flunkeys in the household of Spain, with their new freedom and their new uniforms, are arrogant. Some day, if he has not already done so, an American chap, with more valor than discretion, is going to jail for hitting one of them.

It is a land of mañana, these being the headquarters. You can do anything to-morrow. All you can do to-day is to fume and go up to the Prado, where there is a good street eating store, and get acquainted with café con leche. Every addition to our list of Cuban acquaintances added further proof of the impassability of the Cuban interior. It is easy to be bold before the battle. We felt as bold as Moro Castle looked across

the bay, when we drove around the beautiful shore drive toward Camp Columbia and for a wild, hilarious rush out on the wonderful San Cristobal road. We rushed back again to Havana because we were eager to tackle the impossible.

Two native sugar planters, who had grown white haired in middle Cuba, were introduced to us at the Hotel Pasaje, as conclusive evidence that we were venturing on a dangerous and incredible journey. We listened to them while we changed our northern garb for clothes more suitable to the task ahead of us. At the local garage, we engaged an interpreter, commonly known as "Cuba." He had had some experience as a chauffeur and was the only person we could find who seemed to think there might be a chance of getting beyond the eastern limits of the city. The proprietor of the garage cheerfully assured us that we would never reach Matanzas.

So we left Havana.

Driving on the boulevard which sweeps around the harbor, it was incredible that the ending should be a great desert of broken rock. We did not speculate on the future, but were satisfied to rush over the undulating macadam, rolling up an immense funnel of white dust which spread clear to the tops of the regal palms along the roadside.

Our future was hidden by the hills in front of us. We did not care. It was enough, just to dash at racing speed past little scarlet Edens among the bright flambollan flowers, where the silver-tongued moscareta warbled his southern

song behind the leaves of the spreading laurel and the merry tomequin answered from the majestic ceiba. It was enough, just to fly past palm-thatched huts and wave at the insular urchins who, partly curious and partly fearful, were half-hidden in the doorways. It was enough, just to watch the little speck on the far hillside become a bold, commanding block-house as we raced toward it. Block-houses are still popular in Cuba. One meets up with a block-house on almost any hillside, whether or not there is any apparent habitation in the region.

A few miles and it all ended. The boulevard became merely a long stretch of rough white stones—a new generation of road in the making—level and almost straight, but with no surface over the jagged rocks and no bridges over the many streams. So we drove, part of the time over the rocks and part of the time in the rut-worn gully below. It was hard going, but not impossible. Anyway, it did not last long because this particular road ceased entirely. We were in the middle of Cuba.

A mere path straggled over and among the hills and was lost in the great patches of native rock. We began to take the country seriously. Trepidation mingled with curiosity. Once in a while a good sort of winding dirt road gave promise of speed, only to change, like a dissolving lantern slide, to a staggering trail over the rocks or between them. The stones increased in number and in size. Each occasional break in the bumping, swaying, swinging, car-racking,

... steadying progress became ... the stately palms, the queer huts ... wild red flowers. We did not even ... song of the many birds.

Everywhere was stone. ... were so littered with loose rock ... had not been tried. Each ... defiant effort. ... that, not only were ... their ... had foretold ... the farther we went eastward. ... along to a deep valley from ... sun had already fled and ... bluff of solid rock ...

Night does not settle in ... England. It snaps, or rather, ... night. Twilight is not long enough ... the name. The task of ... crown of the valley was too ... minutes of remaining daylight ... We were not prepared for ... had anticipated spending our nights in ... or towns. We had learned a ... and were still growing in ... particular note of the point that ... traveling through that country in a ... his night stop is invariably just exactly where he happens to be when the sun sets.

That was a wonderful night. It was dark when three of us, including the interpreter, struck into the region of awesome shadows and shivering noises seeking habitation and food. We could see nothing. We simply wandered and yelled

"Insular urchins, partly curious and partly fearful, were half-hidden in the doorways."

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*"Everywhere was stone * * * Each mile was gained by defiant effort."*

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tire-tearing progress became shorter. We forgot the stately palms, the queer huts, and the beautiful red flowers. We did not even hear the evening song of the many birds.

Everywhere was stone. Even the rough fields were so littered with loose rock that cultivation had not been tried. Each mile was gained by defiant effort. We began to worry over the fact that, not only were the prophets vindicated, but their prophecies had foretold worse conditions the farther we went eastward. We thumped along to a deep valley from whose bottom the sun had already fled and on whose far side a great bluff of solid rock arose to dispute our way.

Night does not settle in Cuba as it does in New England. It snaps, or, rather, day snaps into night. Twilight is not long enough to deserve the name. The task of getting to the opposite crown of the valley was too great for the few minutes of remaining daylight; so we camped. We were not prepared for camping, because we had anticipated spending our nights in villages or towns. We had learned a lot that afternoon and were still growing in wisdom. We made particular note of the point that when one is traveling through that country in a motor car his night stop is invariably just exactly where he happens to be when the sun sets.

That was a wonderful night. It was dark when three of us, including the interpreter, struck into the region of awesome shadows and shivering noises, seeking habitation and food. We could see nothing. We simply wandered and yelled

to attract attention. Every time we sent a loud "que hay" reverberating among the hills, we jumped at our own temerity. At last a hound bayed in answer and a feeble light flickered far off, up in the sky. We trudged up another hill toward it.

A gaunt, scraggy Cuban met us. We watched his long machete with fascinated eyes, while the loquacious "Cuba" gave him a detailed account of ourselves, in Spanish. The Cuban welcomed us to his home, a hut of palm slabs roofed with thatch and floored with dirt. By the sinister rays of a small oil torch, mother and children ate a meal of pottage. The children cried and we gave them a few Spanish coins. Charity is cheap in a country of depreciated silver.

We asked for water, and it was drawn from a pigskin. We asked for food, and were told that on the next hill-top dwelt a Great Señor—one Govin, owner of the big newspaper in Havana and who could speak English. We matched coins to see who would venture back alone to the somewhat distant camp with a bucket of water. Crebbin lost and trundled off into the darkness, seeking the light of the bonfire, which furnished our only clue to the whereabouts of headquarters.

Under the talkative guidance of our still wonder-struck Cuban friend, we found the other house. The owner was brought out of bed to hear our reason for being there. He was much interested and much surprised. He was glad to give us food but he refused to be in a hurry. Also Señora, before she started to the kitchen to get us guinea

hen and yams, insisted that the strange tale be repeated to her.

The house of Govin was high above the surrounding country, but there was nothing to see in the darkness and nothing to hear except the barking of dogs and the echoing sounds from distant woods.

Across the front of the low, board house ran a long porch. So closely framed it was in shrubbery, and so dense was the night packed around it, that there was almost the privacy of a room. The master, in his half-attire of white linen, kept up a running fire of conversation, partly in Spanish through and to the interpreter, and partly in English. Highly interested, but, for the most part, quiet, were the several laborers who shared the hospitality of the porch. Occasionally they interjected rapid exclamations and questions in Spanish. It was hard to concentrate upon Señor Govin and our conversation.

The curiousness of the situation had unraveled my nerves. Never before had it seemed possible that a person could be so comparatively close to accustomed things and yet be so isolated. The whole scheme was like a bunch of dramatics grabbed from a play or torn from a copyrighted novel. Persons who are not used to prowling about the back yards and blind alleys of the world find it hard to adjust themselves to strange society, except in the broad light of day.

Probably the two at the roadside camp a mile away, and the one struggling along the hilly trail with a bucketful of water, felt the impres-

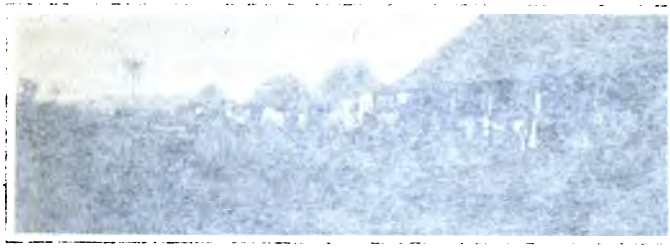
siveness of the night as much, or more, than we who sat on the Govin porch and talked with the Govin family.

It was a romantic situation until Govin, innocently desiring to please, cracked the grandeur of the night and pierced the helpless heavens by turning on the rusty voice of a battered ten-dollar phonograph.

Finally, we ate our delayed supper at our own fireside. We were not yet sleepy. The food and warmth cheered us, for although the days be hot in Cuba, the nights are cold. Twenty-four hours had not acclimated us to a change of fifty degrees in the temperature with the setting of the sun. Then began our vigil.

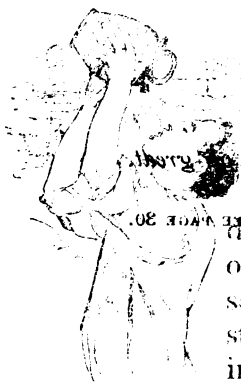
Thirty miles back of us lay Havana with its gay opera, its bright cafés, and its dirty hotels, swarming with tourists. Thirty miles back lay a world's city, known to the world, close to the rest of the world, and familiar to the world as any other capital. Thirty miles back lay our expectations, our fancies, and our nerve. Thirty miles back lay the things we knew. This was unknown wilderness.

Havana to Camp Solitude — thirty miles.



CHAPTER II

Yon [illegible], which stands
As Neptune's, ribbed and paled in with rocks unscalable,
Of adamant.



SECOND-HAND breakfasts, made from the ruins of supper, are never pleasant. It [illegible] gray dawn without even the satisfaction of awakening from sleep. Our second morning in Cuba,—we stolidly watched the dark sky turn into tawny streaks and gradually brighten into daylight. We ate a few crackers and gnawed at a few left-over guinea hen bones, with tea, brewed in a tin cup, for a chaser. We were impatient for the sun to drive the chill out of the morning and out of our bones.

Now we faced the toughest proposition we ever had met; so we dodged it. Easier than trying to climb the bluffs that blocked the way was a circuitous route over the top of a wind-blown, grass-covered hill in somebody's field. We broke

"A hill like a natural stairway of great, rough limestone steps."

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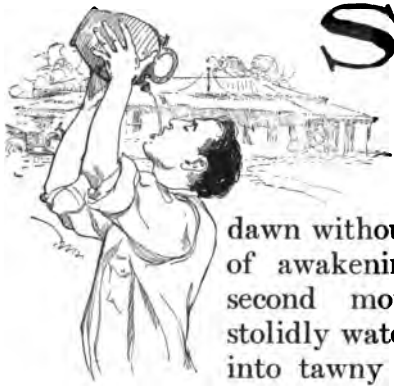
CHAPTER II

Your isle, which stands
As Neptune's, ribbed and paled in with rocks unscalable.
– Cymbeline.



SECOND-HAND breakfasts, made from the ruins of supper, are never pleasant. It is less pleasant to meet the cold, damp, gray dawn without even the satisfaction of awakening from sleep. Our second morning in Cuba,—we stolidly watched the dark sky turn into tawny streaks and gradually brighten into daylight. We ate a few crackers and gnawed at a few left-over guinea hen bones, with tea, brewed in a tin cup, for a chaser. We were impatient for the sun to drive the chill out of the morning and out of our bones.

Now we faced the toughest proposition we ever had met; so we dodged it. Easier than trying to climb the bluffs that blocked the way was a circuitous route over the top of a wind-blown, grass-covered hill in somebody's field. We broke

down the stone fence, drove the car through, and dashed over these fields, skipping from one hill to another. At last we brought up at the back door of the house of Govin. He gave us advice and bananas, both of which we swallowed as fast as we could.

Bananas in Cuba are fine; advice is poor. We were in the center of a magnificent panorama of hills, very green, and fringed with palms that reached the horizon and seemed to be everlasting. Señor Govin had selected his home well. It was a beautiful and wonderful country. Also, it was the third of January and the now scorching sun had warmed us to the continuance of our fight against the rocks. Courage had returned and we were willing to accept whatever Cuba had to offer in the way of highway difficulties.

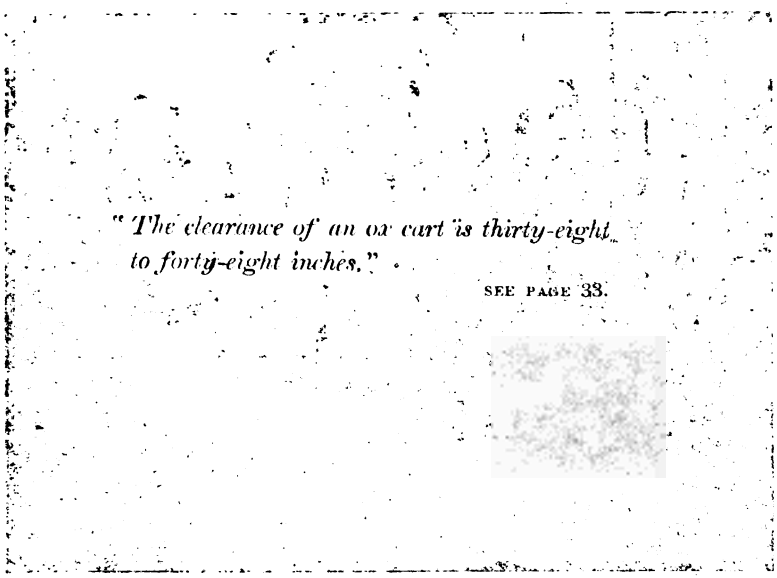
What happened the day before we forgot. There is no time to remember, when journeying as we journeyed. The new difficulties are so rapidly encountered that each experience wipes out the recollection of the previous one. With a good-bye from Señor and a smiling adios from Señora, we ran down a long, clay-covered lane to the stone-floored valley, which was the only road there was to follow. That day we took the measure of our ability to strike the first two letters off the word impossible.

We discovered a new kind of hill — a hill like a natural stairway of great, rough limestone steps. It was steep enough to be an almost impossible climb, even had it been smooth. At the left was a deep gorge on whose bottom wound

power.

the opposite

was likely to



"The clearance of an ox cart is thirty-eight to forty-eight inches."

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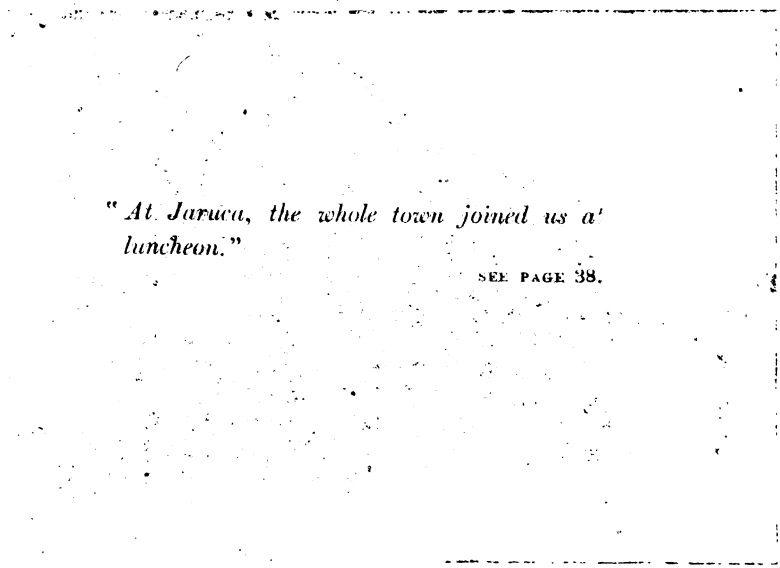

"At Jaruca, the whole town joined us at luncheon."

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the rusty rails of the Havana Central. On the right was a plowed field, crossed by gullies and covered with stones.

Stones, by the way, do not affect agriculture. The soil grows its crop whether cleared of stones or not. They hitch a squad of bulls onto a plow and literally rip up the face of the earth. Then they plant sugar cane. After a while they come around with machetes and cut it down. Next they load it, in half-ton bunches, on ox carts and haul it to the mill. If the roads become worse, by the deepening of the immense ruts, they put on higher wheels and more oxen.

The clearance of an ox cart is thirty-eight to forty-eight inches. When it is wet the carts sink into the earth up to the hubs. They travel in groups, so that when an extremely bad place is reached, the oxen from several carts may be hitched onto each cart in succession. It takes from four to twelve oxen to pull an ordinary cart.

We surveyed that particular hill from all angles, reconnoitering the railway track, the fields, and the hill itself. A native, who happened along, showed us how to cut off the tail of a scorpion with a machete so that he becomes a safe companion. There are scorpions under most of the rocks and there are lots of rocks. Centipedes are correspondingly numerous. We climbed the hill itself, filling the jutting surfaces of the step-like rocks with loose stones and, then, driving up the rough, perilous incline by sheer power.

Next we found that getting down the opposite side of some of these stepped hills was likely to

be harder than getting up. They are so steep that the car slides with the wheels locked. Once we had to fasten a rope to the rear end of the car, give it a couple of turns around a palm tree and let the car go bumping down, a yard at a time. At one place we were lucky enough to find a couple of planks which had been used to bridge a shallow creek, so we drove down the hill by using the planks for skids from one step to the next.

Our first ford was a wide, shallow stream with a hard rock bed. Through the clear rippling water of this first river the car shot with a great splurge and spreading of white spray. We had dreaded the rivers which had been pictured to us as impassable. By this stream was a country grocery, in front of which lounged a rural guard. We asked him if this was a typical river. He laughed and started to tell us about deep torrents that flowed over beds of stone, between wall-like cliffs. We changed the subject and dickered with him for his machete, with which he claimed to have killed seven Spaniards during the last war.

Rural guards are near soldiers. They get more money than United States regulars and wear better clothes, with celluloid collars that are wiped clean every day. They carry machetes and revolvers. They will sell either or both. They ride good ponies and go to country dances. They are not impressive.

The route continued an interesting one. There are more kinds of trail in a half day's journey in Cuba than there is in going from Hell's Gate to

"Through the clear rippling water of this first river the car shot with a great splurge."

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the Golden Gate. A comparatively level stretch of red dirt, strewn with boulders, suddenly leaves off in a tract of grass where the route is marked only by stone fences. Where the red soil is hard, the travel is not extremely difficult, the principal obstruction being loose stones, which must be dodged. The same dirt, soaked up by a heavy rain, becomes a bottomless mire. In some places there is nothing to follow but a path through high-growing sugar cane. In other places, unless the ground is seamed with deep ruts by the continuous travel of heavy ox carts in wet weather, the only thing which signifies a traveled path will be the country stores. Some of these are in board houses. Most of them are merely thatched huts. They all keep a little supply of vile liquors and canned meats. At some of them it is possible to buy oranges and bananas.

During those scorching days, with infrequent opportunities to get good drinking water, we quenched our thirst with the juice of many oranges. They are little ones, but cheap and good. We bought them by the dozen and threw them loosely into the folded top, back of the tonneau. Bananas we ate immediately upon purchase. The tree-ripened bananas of Cuba are very thin skinned and delicious, but one hour in the sun spoils them.

Our second morning's work, to relate, would appear to be the tale of a long journey. As a matter of fact, we laboriously worked our way over the rocks for a few miles to Jaruca, where we stopped for lunch. Jaruca was our first

interior village. We had passed no towns since leaving Havana. We got our initial experience of a typical inland meal and started in learning to like the peculiar style of cooking which is partly Spanish, partly devilish, and ninety-five per cent. grease.

The main thing to eat is a pottage of beans and meat, fried bananas and chicken or guinea, cooked with rice. In the large towns or in places near the rivers or along the coast, there is always fish. The bread is good everywhere. It comes in small individual loaves and is so greatly "shortened" that it needs no butter, which is a good thing. There is no butter, except the canned stuff shipped in from the United States. This is impossible. It looks like melted vaseline. We did not taste it.

At Jaruca, the whole town joined us at luncheon. Only those who had been to Havana had seen an automobile and some of them had never heard of one. They were all timid. In addition to which, we were Americans. The interior Cubans have a very sensible respect for los Americanos. They are frank in their inspection of a stranger. At the café, where we sat at a corner table almost on the sidewalk, we were surrounded by the closely packed populace, that carefully examined our make-up, from toes to turbans, and discussed us in Spanish. Those who did not stick by us during the meal clustered about the car. Hunger is a preventive of embarrassment. Besides, we broke even with the town by scaring it out of its wits with an

exhibition of fast and fancy driving on the way to the edge of the village.

That afternoon we made good use of our hatchet. Many times there would be several drops, or great depressions, in the rock and at each place we would have to cut down underbrush alongside the path that we might get around the hole. Much of the driving was in deep trenches where the travel of many ox carts had worn the ruts into a ditch. For hundreds of yards we drove between these close walls of dirt, where the grass-covered ground, on either side, rose higher than the car. This ditch, winding past rows of huts in which lived sugar plantation laborers, debouched now and then into open territory, where the road was any feasible way among the shrubs, rocks, palms, and ruts.

We began to tire under the hard work and were glad that the sun was sinking rapidly toward the line of hills back of us. We hoped to reach suitable shelter before dark, for we needed a night of real sleep. We struck the first river of consequence, and one of us waded through it to find out where and how we might cross. It was not difficult, but this was not the region of rivers. We had yet to cross the ones of which we had been warned.

Rivers down there are both a blessing and a curse. They stop traffic and they stop thirst. There are but few wells. We struck one artesian well which supplied water for many square leagues. A league, incidentally, has its own meaning, being a colloquial measure of about a

mile and a half, instead of the usual three miles implied by the marine kind. Most of the drinking water comes from the rivers. It is carried away in cans or water jars. The former are principally five-gallon kerosene cans saved for the purpose. It is not very good water and, unless obtained at a store, is given one to drink from a porron.

A porron is a Spanish-made clay bottle with an opening at the top, through which to fill it, and a small nozzle on one side, through which to empty it. The use of the porron is the only visible evidence of cleanliness on the island. It is against all etiquette and many rules to touch the spout to the lips. You simply aim as well as you can and hit your mouth as often as you can.

We ended our journey at Benavides. Benavides is a dot on the map. In reality, it is a board hut, yclept grocery. We had fought our way thirty-four miles. Hungrily impatient, we waited in the stone-flagged main room of the house for a much-fried supper. We ate it by the glimmer of a side lamp. Around the dirty table at which we sat, collected all the inhabitants of the house, and a dozen others who must have lived somewhere but who appeared and disappeared in a mysteriously dramatic fashion.

It was a dismal meal and a poor one and we were cross. We were glad to creep onto the wire spring cots which they spread for us in a partially enclosed corner of the hut. That night we accrued some more wisdom about touring in Cuba. We undressed, for we had not yet learned our part, but that was the last time we were so foolish,

except one joyous night when we put up at a regular hotel in the real city of Santa Clara.

Each of us had, underneath, a wire mattress, and, on top, a starched sheet. Cold air rushed through the meshes of the woven wire, for the night was a chill one, while the starched sheet felt like the dank sides of a sepulchre. Outside, innumerable pigs grunted between the several acts of a protracted dog fight, and the chickens, which roosted in the house, fluttered from one corner of the room to another; the many fleas were still bolder.

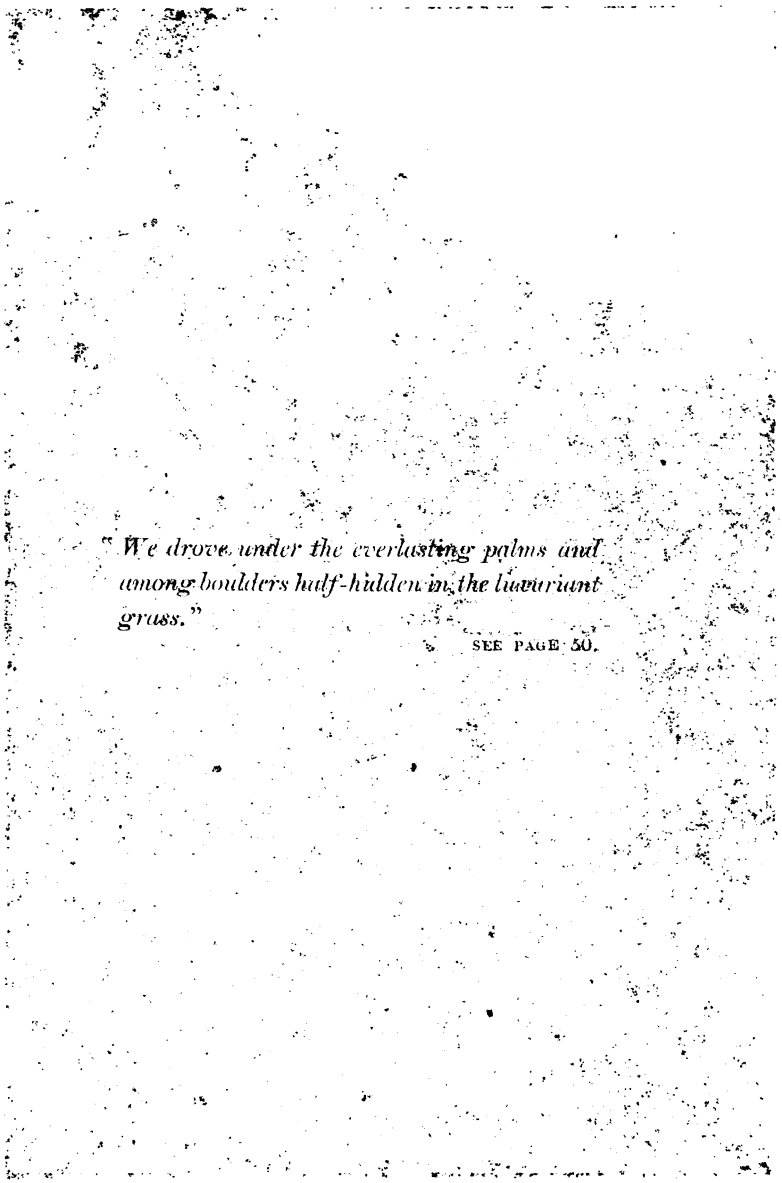
There is an intimacy about living things in Cuba which is somewhat appalling to a man who has been more or less used to picking his associates, or, at least, his family. Cats, dogs, chickens, and pigs are welcome in the household. The children sit on the floor and quarrel with each other and with the dogs. It is not infrequent to find a hut which has its household snake. There are no poisonous snakes on the Isle de Cuba, but there is a large brand which looks as if it would like to be poisonous if it knew how. Just as the family dog, in Illinois, protects the house against burglars, so the family snake in Santa Clara Province protects the house against rats—but this is not a tale of grewsome things.

Each successive night had its elements of humor, but that night at Benavides we had not yet arisen to the greatness of mind and broadness of character which permitted us to enjoy the humorous phases of the evening. We rolled around on our cots to change the water marks

which the wire mattress made in our skin, and tried to sleep during the brief intervals between occasions when it was necessary to awake and pull the sheets back onto us. If all of the other fellows had the same shrinkage of the soul which I experienced that night (and, out of fairness to myself, I think they did), the expedition came awfully close to needing an epitaph.

Camp Solitude to Benavides — thirty-four miles.

[45]



"We drove under the everlasting palms and among boulders half-hidden in the luxuriant grass."

SEE PAGE 50.

CHAPTER III

The high palme-trees, with braunches faire,
Out of the lowly vallies did arise,
And high shoote up their heads into the skyes.
—Spenser.

HEATHEN who worship the sun are not such bad philosophers, after all. For the second time we learned that the bright sun changes the circumstances; so we resolved to make our pluck last from sunrise to sunrise, instead of from sunrise to sunset. We were sanguine travelers who set out from Benavides to Matanzas, over a fairly good yellow clay road which lasted only about one-third of the nine miles to Cuba's show town at the head of the Yumuri Valley. We gayly bid good morning to the familiar rocks.

Crossing them was not as hard work as it had been the first day. Places which had puzzled and almost stumped us, we crossed with Icarian

abandon. Waldon, at the steering wheel, had learned new tricks of acrobatic motoring and all of us had developed unexpected ingenuity in makeshift road engineering. We did not waste any time in rolling away the wrong rock or any other rock than the one whose removal was absolutely necessary to make progress possible. We had developed a system of team work and were able to go over these patches of rock at four or five miles an hour where, previously, we had been able to make only two or three.

Coming to a place where there was a new road under construction, but not far enough under to be used for motoring, we encountered the contractor in charge of the grading. He was an English-speaking Cuban, who had served time in the United States, and was greatly amazed at our approach. The only way we could convince him that we had driven from Havana was by pointing out that we could not have come from any other place. He seemed to like us and so gave us all the information he had concerning the impossibility of going any farther than Matanzas.

Every first-class city in Cuba has a road. It does not straggle out of town. It darts straight into the country as though it intended to cross the island. After a couple of miles it stops, as if the money had run out, the mayor had died, or some other calamity had occasioned its sudden ending. About six inches past the edge of the macadam there is likely to be a deep morass, a bed of rocks that look as though they had been thrown there from a volcano, or a great confusion of bottomless

ruts. There is no such thing as a compromise between the good and the bad. It is either one or the other. We struck the good about the time we came within sight of the cathedral towers of Matanzas.

It was quite a novelty to drive fast over the smooth macadam. We had almost forgotten that we ever had been in any other country or that we ever had driven an automobile fast enough to roll up dust. Passing a beautiful cemetery with a magnificent wall and gateway, the interpreter explained that it was possible for a Cuban town to maintain a beautiful cemetery because it leases the lots instead of selling them, and the income from the dead is fairly permanent. Edwin made a real joke, by asking what they did with the dead beats who did not pay the rent.

An astonished rural guard, on the outskirts of Matanzas, was glad to drop his duties and accompany us in the car to the center of town. He guided us to the Grand Hotel Paris. That word "grand," as applied to the Cuban hotels, is a great deal like the word "best," as applied to automobiles in American advertising. There are so many Grand Hotels at which one would not stop, except out of necessity, that the word has lost its meaning. This one, however, was fairly deserving of the title and we were immediately charmed with the clerk.

Rogelio Gaarken was his name, and he was the first Cuban we had met who did more thinking than jabbering. "Cuba," our original interpreter, was to go back to Havana from here, so

we shanghaied Rogelio, much to the disgust of the proprietor, because this was the tourist season and Rogelio was needed to bring down Havana's overflow of sightseers at eleven dollars per, guide to the Yumuri Valley and dinner, with a thirty-cent bottle of wine, thrown in.

It was nine o'clock when we reached Matanzas and two o'clock when we left. The visiting fever had struck us and we loitered away the hours seeing some of the most convenient sights and adding to our stingy supplies. We put in some groceries and road building hardware, including a mattock.

A mattock is worth two dollars in Spanish money, but in usefulness it is worth twelve shovels, six crowbars and three hatchets. The pick end is the best mechanical substitute for dynamite, while the wide blade on the other side can be used for anything from chopping out shale and rock-like clay to peeling sugar cane for luncheon. We also purchased as much gasoline as we could carry, for Matanzas is the only place in Cuba where it is refined. Gasoline is an uncertain quantity down there. We had got beyond being critical about the uncertainty of its quality. The smallest town has kerosene and some of the country stores carry benzine. Gasoline is only found in the larger cities, where the mayor or some other dignitary owns a gasoline stove.

The government engineer of the Province of Matanzas gave us a blue print showing the way we should go toward Santa Clara. After he had finished his elaborate directions, he told us that

it would be impossible to travel that road. He said that we might go a little way but would soon come to a river fifteen to twenty feet deep and a hundred yards wide. Our only comment was:

"Adios."

Jagged rocks had made our tires suffer and we were not well supplied with extras. "Cuba," returning to Havana, carried word to the garage there to ship new tires to us at Santa Clara. As we followed the blue print out of town, our conversation dwelt on the river.

Slowly and laboriously picking our way toward the wide, deep gorge in which the dreaded stream itself was hidden, we schemed out a lot of things that would have been a credit to Robinson Crusoe and other noted performers of bogus engineering feats. Our favorite plan was an immense raft of palm trunks, it being agreed that, if we worked all night, we could probably get the raft ready to float by morning.

We came upon the river unexpectedly, our first intimation of its whereabouts being three bare piers sticking above the bluff and telling of the destructive march of Weyler through a province that once had boasted a few century-old bridges. Then we saw the river. It was as dry as the top of a hill, a fair sample of the many valleys floored with nothing but rocks of volcanic roughness. It was marvelous that the tires were not literally torn from the rims and that the twisted wheels and groaning frame did not weaken under the strenuous task.

Having crossed so much rock, we argued that surely nothing worse could be ahead. We began to gain confidence in ourselves and to lose confidence in Cuban information. When the government engineer of a province did not know that a river a few miles from his office was only full of water in the wet season, we concluded that the mere prophecies of provincials were not worth worrying about.

Ambling along until nightfall, we often crossed fields where it was easier to take a roundabout way than to try to follow the trail. Slowly we drove under the everlasting palms and among the boulders half-hidden in the luxuriant grass. The war had bled fast and furiously around here. Stone houses of the Spanish period all were gone or stood in ruins, dim pages in the history of minor battles which never will be written. The country had blossomed again. The red flambollan, the stately sugar cane, and the fast-growing bananas had wiped the stain away, but thatch-roofed huts replaced the old Spanish houses which once reared picturesquely in wild regions.

For miles the road would be marked by wavering stone fences, but there was nothing between these fences to show that it had been used since the war or that it ever had been anything else than the rock-strewn virgin soil. Sometimes the grass grew as high as the car. Sometimes the fences would be long lines of palms, framing a magnificent vista of miles upon miles that ended in the blue, blue hills at the horizon. Had there been a road between these fences or between these

palms, Mercury himself could have asked no better speedway.

As the country became flatter, sugar plantations became larger and more frequent. Now and then we would strike the railway, at a sugar mill siding or where it passed through some village. We scared the whole town of Limonar out of the lethargy into which it had sunk since the war. Isolated and without excitement save local brawls, dances and cock fights, the sudden bursting into its midst of a motor car, manned by Americans, was like the bursting of the first bomb of another war. Having stopped to buy oranges, the inhabitants—men, women, debutantes in sheath gowns of the original pattern, and little children—chased us as far as they could hold the pace. This was easy until we found a fairly level field and drove out into the loneliness of vast country where there is nothing except the rapid growth of wild plants and grasses.

Recklessly we drove through deep grass, among the burned houses and ruined fences, always reminding us of the fact that we were probably the first to follow across these provinces in wake of the devastating armies of a decade past. Hidden in the grass were ruts that had been cut by heavily loaded ox carts years before and which had hardened almost like rock.

Eventually we arrived at Tosca, a handful of huts set in a bleak region of grass, where there were not even palm trees to hide poverty and desolation. We had ceased to ask if we might stay. We simply announced ourselves and took

what we could get. Here, it was a supper of our own canned stuff, purchased at Matanzas; eggs which we bought of one of the farmers at a dollar a dozen, and bread furnished by the hospitable family which had nothing else to offer, except the use of their living room. We ate by candlelight, under the curious gaze of astounded farmers, timid women, and the frightened glances of little babies, who sat on the floor and sucked sugar cane.

Every time we gathered, in the evening, around some Cuban farm-house table, we were impressed by the fact that our trip had two distinct parts and was, in reality, two distinct journeys. One was a journey by day, over a hard and trying land. The other was a journey by night, into many peculiar places. By day, we worked and studied the country. At night, we loitered and studied the people. Each day was complete in itself. We never paid attention to what had passed or to what might come. Perhaps, because we were tired, generally, it was easier than thinking, speculating, or planning, just to sit among the Cubans and be interested in them. Little things were mutually amusing.

The fact that we brewed tea in huge cups and drank it in huge, hot gulps amused the Cubans. Courteously and gladly, they heated water and, then, laughed to see us pour it on the little green leaves. On the other hand, we were amused by the universal presence of sewing machines. The smaller and meaner the hut, the more prominently loomed the sewing machine. The real

Cuban lives in almost squalor; dresses in almost rags. The squalor is accented by the sewing machine. Ragged pants are sewed together and patched, likewise.

The Cuban has a few passions. He gratifies these and does not give a rap for anything else. The sewing machine is evidently one of the national passions — carefully cultivated by the enterprising foreign department of the sewing machine trust. But the greatest of Cuban passions is gambling. The lid is on bull-fighting and cock-fighting in Cuba. It is a leaky lid. When Saturday night comes, the ragged Cuban goes to a dirty corner in his dirty hut, raises a dirty board and brings out a dirty bag, in which are many dirty Spanish dollars. He places the bag carefully under one arm and under the other, still more carefully, he places his favorite little black rooster and starts off for the nearest cock pit. Money is merely a medium of wager.

Our daily march was improving. We had gone forty-four miles.

That evening we spent rearranging our supplies and tools in the tousled tonneau. Whatever we had that was not necessary we threw away, and placed our road implements where they would rattle the least, knock our shins the least, and yet be ready for instant use. Then we raised the top and entertained each other with merry persiflage, until we were sleepy enough to lay down in our clothes on benches within the hut and forget it.

Sleep was our greatest need. Shivering through

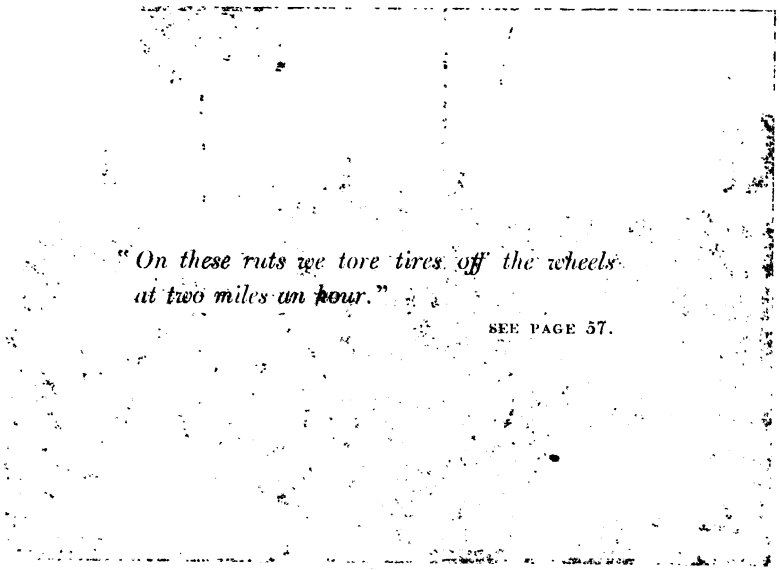
long wakeful hours of another night spent in our clothes, on hard boards, attacked by fleas, and awakened by the clamor of yawling dogs and puling chickens, we found a tonic in Rogelio, whom we called "Roe." He was an excellent type of that dark-hued, wiry Cuban, whose well-chiseled features and wonderful black eyes are far superior to the alleged beauty of the Cuban woman. Some of the mahogany-tinted country women have such eyes, but never the señorita of the town. The latter is, in most cases, simply a human synonym for talcum powder. I would like to corner the powder market in Cuba.

Rogelio was quaint, as well as handsome. Some ancestor had been a humorist and a philosopher. Rogelio became one of us. He made it easier for us to look up at the dark, thatched roof and to fill our sleepless moments with laughter instead of commiseration.

Benavides to Tosca — forty-four miles.

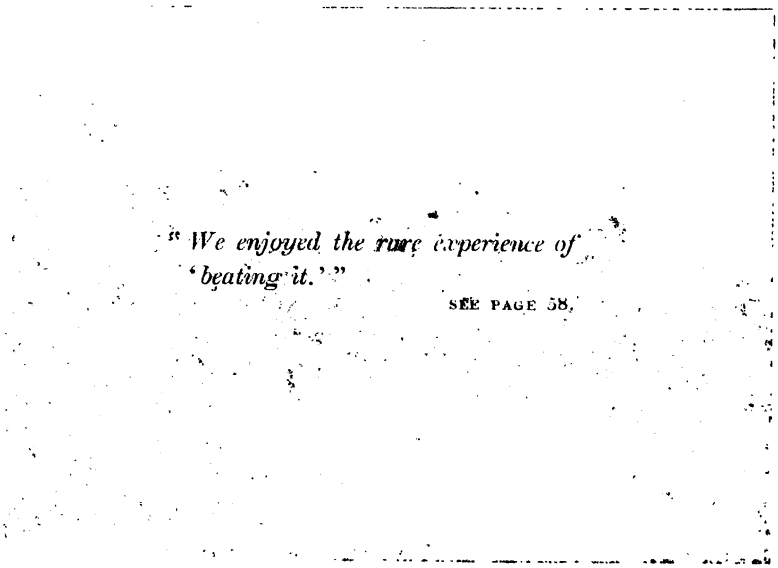
CHAPTER

[57]



"On these ruts we tore tires off the wheels at two miles an hour."

SEE PAGE 57.

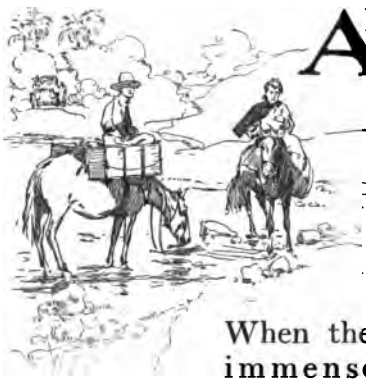


"We enjoyed the rare experience of 'beating it.'"

SEE PAGE 58.

CHAPTER IV

Magnum iter adscendo ; sed dat mihi gloria vires.
— Propertius.



ALL ruts, except those made by ox carts, are merely imitations. The country through which we were passing soaks water like a sponge in the wet season. It dries quickly. When the red soil is soft, the immense, heavily-laden carts sink into and cut gashes three or four feet deep in the face of the earth. These parallel, intersect, and cross one another. There is only one way to drive a car over them; that is to always keep the wheels on the high spots. Sometimes the high spot may be wide; sometimes narrow as the wheel; sometimes it may be the sloping side of a gully. On these ruts and on the rocks we tore tires off the wheels at two miles an hour.

From Tosca to Macagua is sixty miles of ruts.

As we left the region where the road is over bare rock, we began to work into a region where the ruts alternate with mud. For a short distance the ground had been untraversed for a long time, and was hard and fairly smooth. We enjoyed the rare experience of "beating it," which down there meant eighteen to twenty miles an hour. This respite from the usual difficulties was brief, for the road finally became merely an opening between sugar fields.

The cane, sweeping the car on either side, rose far above our heads and for many miles it was never possible to see in front of us farther than a few hundred yards. Leaving the sugar cane for short drives over open ground, we noticed that this must have been a particularly patriotic section during the fighting with Spain. Most of the scattered houses were of stone or boards, calcimined white, light blue, or yellow, and nearly each one bore the roughly painted sign: "Viva Cuba Libre."

Lunch was eaten in a street café at Colon, and while there we became acquainted with the four-hundred of a typical inland city. Politicians in such localities bear reputable names socially and lead the village society. We needed gasoline and were told that there was a private supply owned by a man who was then at the home of the mayor, on the outskirts, where the beaux and belles of Colon had been invited to a dinner party by his honor. We were asked to join the festivities, but excused ourselves and took the oil monopolist back to the town that

he might sell us one of his precious ten-gallon cans of gasoline.

The people of the farms that we had met had been picturesque and interesting. The social leaders of this small city were very ordinary types in their commonplace imitation of American dressing. They are uninteresting anomalies, striving for a conventionality of which they know little. They have a color line which does not exist in the country. Out among the hills, the only line of demarkation is the age limit above which it is considered proper and right that little boys and little girls should wear clothes.

We were now running comparatively near the railway and small stations were frequent. To most of these, mahogany was being brought up from the forests of the south, one immense log at a time being hauled on a cart drawn by from four to a dozen oxen. The progress is about two miles an hour when the road is not muddy.

More ruts, open fields covered with loose rocks, mud holes and, then, Macagua, a town to remember. It boasted an hotel, which was club, general store, saloon and salon to the village and surrounding country. We had beds for the first time in Cuba, but our real experience that evening was not in them. Being Sunday, it was a day of celebration.

There had been a baseball game in which the Pinks beat the Blues. Cuba is baseball crazy. Each country team has dainty cotton-flannel suits, which they put on after the game for the purpose of parading around the town. There

was a balloon ascension at dusk—a hot-air balloon of red, white, and blue paper going up in flames. The star number on the program was the evening dance. The orchestra, composed of the blackest of Cuban negroes, came early with its kettle drums, cornet, clarinet, gourd and trombone. The tunes were of local invention. A file drawn across the teeth gives the same sensation as the rasping noise they made.

Local society took possession of the hotel floor. They danced a slow, sleepy, never-ceasing, never-changing two-step. The black rabble stood outside, watching the scene through open doors and windows. When each dance was done, the couples marched around in an endless parade. Then the young swains exchanged partners or managed to select the maidens of their respective hearts' desire. If a young man wanted a certain girl, he grabbed her partner by the unengaged arm, made a few farcical bows, which the grabbed party would duplicate and then withdraw, it being considered highly improper to protest the transfer. By the way of an extra for the edification of the entire party, the American embassy rang in a cake walk.

Our beds were on the balcony which surrounded the second floor of the hotel building. We slept as men will who have not slept in four days.

Tosca to Macagua — sixty miles.

CHAPTER V

* * * *for now to* [illegible]

[illegible]

B[illegible]

cheats, the [illegible] Oshkosh. There [illegible] who said he lived [illegible] knew every foot of the country [illegible] to his farm in the morning, would be glad to show us the difficultly followed trail. We took him along.

It was very early in the morning and the sun was straight ahead, shining into our eyes over the [illegible] which had not yet been dispelled. We ran [illegible] town into a great fen, where

"Palm trees by the thousand, and, scattered among them, small ponds made by heavy rainfall."

SEE PAGE 65.

"The car looked like some big black beast, wallowing along in boundless marsh."

SEE PAGE 65.

CHAPTER V

* * * *for now began*
Night with her sullen wings to double-shade the desert.
—Milton.

BY its very monotony, human nature is disappointing. Interior Cubans are guileless, frank, generous, meek, dirty, willing, and altogether submissive and obedient. In other words, they are children. But a community like Macagua has its four-flushers, its liars, and its cheats, the same as London, New York, and Oshkosh. There had been at the dance a man who said he lived some distance eastward, knew every foot of the country and, on returning to his farm in the morning, would be glad to show us the difficultly followed trail. We took him along.

It was very early in the morning and the sun was straight ahead, shining into our eyes over the low mist which had not yet been dispelled. We ran right from town into a great fen, where

only a few stunted palm trees rose above the vast ocean of rank guinea grass, covering invisible mires. We could not see the wet places until we ran into them. Trying to get around a deep mud hole, we bumped into a palm tree and had to cut it down.

Chopping a palm tree is like chopping steel tubing. A hundred glancing blows of machete, mattock and axe leave a few scratches on the trunk of the tree. It was while we were hacking away at this palm that our volunteer guide informed us that we were lost. There is no definite road through the tall grass which hides the treacherous swamps. The sun is the best guide. We began to wish for the rocks that we had struggled over, back in Matanzas Province. Our displeasure we vented on the unfortunate fraud who had invented his guide story to obtain a ride in the wonderful automobile from the United States. We were even disappointed that he did not mind being left anywhere to walk back. Provincial Cubans do not travel far from home, ever, but they will wander in any direction with you and worry not at all about going back. The lack of palatable food is about the same in one place as another, and the hut of one Cuban is about as homelike as that of another, so they are seemingly indifferent to time or place.

Sighting the railway, we decided to quit trying to follow the hidden trail through the swamp and take to the right-of-way. Imagine running along the worst railway roadbed of which you can think, just inside the fence, regardless of grades, banks,

or ravines. Imagine such a stretch of road covered thick and deep with grass. For several leagues this is what we had, until we struck a high plateau where there was no habitation and no road—only palm trees, by the thousands, and, scattered among them, small ponds made by heavy rainfall.

The grass was short. The sun scorched and there was nothing to drink. We had forgotten to lay in our usual supply of oranges. We wandered about, guided by the sun and trying to keep to the correct general direction. Palm trees are not close together like the trees of a northern forest, but at a certain distance their white trunks bank into a solid wall. Always, it seemed, we were in the middle of a large, white-paled arena. Here, also, Rogelio pointed out to us the flat-topped guao tree, which is dreaded by the natives because of the popular belief that to rest in its shadow means sleep and death.

After awhile we hit a sandy trail which had been the bed of some long since dried-out river. It was seamed in a thousand directions by the draining off of recent rains. We welcomed the approach of the first person we had met since morning, a horse-back rider who appeared to be honestly familiar with the country and who led us, once more, to the trail we had lost. We encountered more tall grass. To a spectator, the car must have looked like some big, black beast, wallowing along in boundless marsh.

A deep blue ridge in the east betokened mountains. We were in a valley. That afternoon

we forded nine shallow rivers and rushed innumerable short steep climbs up their farther banks. Some of these grades seemed to stand the car on end, both going down and coming up. At many of them we were forced to stop and cut out notches in the hard clay or solid rock, to clear the fly wheel, when the car should go up over the sharp crown of the hill.

At a small, isolated grocery store, where we stopped for oranges, we learned that we had missed San Domingo, our immediate objective point, by many miles, and so struck directly eastward for Esperanza. It was discouraging information, for we had not eaten at all that day. We were fighting hard and our mettle was improving. We had long since dropped the habit of anxiety that had shadowed our efforts on the first two days.

We kept on going lower and lower into the valley. The valley became muddier and muddier. We crossed quagmires by the score, some of them by following a carefully planned route over solid spots. Others we crossed by making a rough causeway of brush and any broken trees and limbs which we could find. Still others, whose bottoms, by probing with a stick, we found to be made of hard rock, we took by "shooting"—which means driving full tilt straight through the mud and water. "Shooting" became a common pastime with us and a by-word. At every mire one of us would run ahead of the car, size it up or investigate, and yell back the directions to "shoot her" or

one of us to
over the high
safely driven
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nd of

"The valley became muddier and muddier."

SEE PAGE 66.

"The sun's farewell glance spread a woven gold mantilla on the naked shoulders of a grim, forbidding world and the motor car sank, helpless, into the mud as if, also, its day was done."

SEE PAGE 69.

to get out and help build a floating bridge of brush.

We had crossed several rivers that would have been ten to fifteen feet deep with water during the rainy season. Even now some of them had treacherous bottoms of irregularly piled stone. Before fording, it was necessary for one of us to wade through to map out a route over the high places along which the car might be safely driven through the water. We did not stop for a meal at Esperanza, because the daylight was going away from Santa Clara faster than we were going towards it and we wished to spend the night there. We had not yet driven after dark, but to-night it seemed that either we would have to do so or camp in a seemingly uninhabited tract of marshy land.

The low clouds in the west, reflecting the crimson glory of the sun's farewell glance, spread a woven gold mantilla on the naked shoulders of a grim, forbidding world, and the motor car sank, helpless, into the deep mud as if, also, its day was done. We hesitated before we went to work. We knew that, somewhere, away off behind the big, dark hills, was Santa Clara, food, and shelter. We knew that, somehow, we would raise the car from the enveloping mire. We had accomplished more difficult tasks, yet we hesitated. The flaming clouds darkened into livid fires which flickered and went out. There was no twilight. In the gloom of ominous night, broken only by the slender rays from an oil lamp, we took a new reef in our nerve and began another round of

the desperate, elemental fight against the mud. One of us searched for long poles to use as pries. Another vainly sought to make a solid foundation for the jack underneath the car. The others collected rocks. We had previously cursed these ever-present boulders, which we now welcomed. All worn by the day's hard work and with a big job before us, we stopped, enchanted, as from the faraway hills came the clear, melodious "ah, ohs!" of the voceo de ganado—the silver tones of the native Cuban, calling home his cattle.

"Oiga, chico!" yelled the sanguine Rogelio.

"Que hay!" came the answering call.

Soon white-trousered, bare-footed, dark, wiry fellows surrounded the strange vehicle of los Americanos. All the wealth of words in the Spanish tongue seemed insufficient to express their wonderment. Like a small army, guided and bullied by their natural leader, they carried stones, swung on the long poles, yelled and fussed until, one after another, the wheels were raised and set on an uncertain floor of rough rocks. Waldon jumped to his seat behind the wheel. The motor spit and steadied to the old familiar purr. The native audience stood tense and spellbound. The clutch engaged. With a mighty wrench, the big car tore itself free, scattering behind a wild volley of stones and mud, and jumped to the solid ground ahead.

"El Toro!" cried a Cuban.

"El Toro!" echoed the chorus. And thus was christened the car.

It was nine o'clock, with headlights going for

the first time on the precious store of gas, when we again set out to find Santa Clara. The hills were flat-crowned and in quick succession. We could see nothing but a narrow streak of yellow rock ahead. We seemed always to be rising, rising, rising, to the top of everything. Palestine must have looked like this on a still, dark night. We could almost imagine some Old Testament friend would steal out of the dark and bid us halt.

Our entrance to Santa Clara was in sharp contrast to the last few hours of wandering in the solitude of the black night. We rambled noisily over its cobbled streets. We had knocked the muffler away from the exhaust pipe on some grass-hidden rock, and El Toro roared. The whole population ran to the iron-barred windows or into the streets to follow us in a curious, turbulent stream.

The hotel landlord welcomed us at the door and, as it was now raining hard, hurried to help us find shelter for the car. Then we ate a cold and disappointing meal in a night owl street café. An excited little man with a big pad of paper, who said he was the reporter of the Santa Clara newspaper, persisted in getting an extensive interview through the now collapsed interpreter. None of us ever read that story, but, judging from the manner of the fervid scribe, it must have drained empty the possibilities of Cuban journalism.

We retired in a hopeful mood. This had been our record day—sixty-three miles. We had gone

to Matanzas, and they said we could not. We had crossed rivers and swamps, and they had said we could not. In five days we had gone 231 miles over country that was said to be impossible for any four-wheeled vehicle. We had yet to cross the mountains. They said we could not, but we thought we could.

Macagua to Santa Clara—sixty-three miles.

"A river would be reached by following down a tortuous pass."

SEE PAGE 77.

CHAPTER VI

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
From morn to night, my friend.
— Christina Rossetti.

CAMAJUANI is not well known. We never had heard of it until Tuesday, January 7, 1908. By noon of the same day we found that there was no place which we wished to reach quite so badly as Camajuani. We wanted to go to a lot of other places, but, to reach any of them, we had to go via Camajuani. We had driven ourselves into a predicament just because we had followed the advice of one Fernandez, urbane landlord of the Santa Clara Hotel.

We were bound southeastward from Santa Clara, through Placetas. Camajuani is northeast of Santa Clara. Señor Fernandez said that it was necessary to go through Camajuani to reach

Placetas. We believed him. He also told us that the heavy rain, which almost obscured the rugged mountain range ahead of us, would not continue. Again we believed him, although, as we eyed the morning prospect, it did not look promising to us.

At noon it continued to rain. Northern rains of our previous experience had been mere sprinkles in comparison with this tropical downpour. We had come six or seven miles. There was no use in going back, because that was just as hard as going ahead. Without sun, compass, highway, or guide of any kind, we were not much surer of the location of Santa Clara than we were of the whereabouts of the much-sought Camajuani. It was a rough, wet country, looking as though nature had dumped here everything left over when she tired of molding the rest of Cuba into shape.

Rivers and creeks were at the bottom of each red dirt hill, now soaked into muggy slime in which the protruding rocks made every inch of the way a precarious, uncertain struggle. As the hills became higher and the gorges became deeper, we came closer to the great ravines of the Santa Fe mountain passes. The country was rougher than any we had yet tackled. The only road we had to follow was the rough irregular trillo, or pony trail, across the hills, by way of the innumerable ravines, washouts, and river beds.

The first few miles out of Santa Clara were over a fairly good macadam road, which gradually

dissolved into a soggy trail of wet clay. The first tire to go that day exploded while we were wallowing through the deep mud in the lee of a ruined Spanish fort. Rogelio, being energetic and just as keen for accomplishment as the rest of us, volunteered to replace this tire. On several occasions he had wished to help us in changing the inner tubes or casings. Not wishing to shirk our own work, however, we spared Rogelio and saved him for the pump. Also, on many occasions we carefully conserved his energy for frequent little skits with the machete, which he handled nicely.

We knocked off work to prowl around the ruined fort, which, evidently, had set in the center of a much-battled battle-field. When a running schedule approximates a mile and a half an hour, a few extra minutes spent in sightseeing do not seriously affect it. In the meantime, the rain continued and increased. Washouts and deep ravines, that we might have crossed the day before without serious difficulty, were now becoming almost impassable on account of the swashy mud. Where this mud was only a thin layer of slime over the native rock, the hillsides, which we had to climb in a zigzag fashion, were so slippery that even the surefooted Cuban ponies we occasionally met on the trail would slide and sprawl.

Between each line of hills ran a river. This would be reached by following down a tortuous pass or a winding, rough shelf on the side of a cliff. Three large rivers were forded. If ever

there had been bridges, they had been burnt. Each ford meant a slow, difficult drive through water nearly two feet deep and over a treacherous bottom, partly of stone, partly of loose rock, and partly of clay or sand. Sometimes, in order to cross a river a hundred yards wide, it would be necessary to drive an irregular, oblique course an eighth of a mile long.

When we could not follow the regular path up the hillside on the other side of a river, we would be compelled to take to the bare side of the hill, and go up in any possible direction to the top of the bluff, there to find a roundabout way back to the trail. Many of the mountain passes were so narrow and so furrowed with yawning gullies that we were forced to run with one wheel on a slightly sloping side wall and the other on the narrow crest of the deepest rut. This frequently compelled us to cut narrow shelves in the rock to form a solid footing for the wheels. Both going down the ravines and up the opposite ones, driving was a case of slipping around on the rut brows. Had a wheel dropped into one of these ruts, it would have meant a long, tedious job of jacking-up on a foundation of loose rocks.

We must have been about a third of the way up the highest crest of the Santa Fe mountains at noon. The car had tipped sidewise to a rakish angle, with the left wheels deep in the mud, the middle of the car resting on ruts, and the right wheels in space, while the whole car was pointed upward on a stiff grade. Everything was

soaked, including our box of groceries. We opened a can of sausages with a machete, they being the only food which the rain had not spoiled.

The worst insult is that which comes from one's own brother. As we sat munching our mock luncheon, while the rain beat against our faces, ran down our backs, flooded our tonneau, and washed the bottom out of the ravine we were trying to climb, we were greeted by a young American surveyor on horseback and almost hidden within the ample folds of a rubber poncho. We explained ourselves and he explained himself, and then started to explain the Santa Fe mountains. He was quite certain that we could never reach the top of the ridge; in fact, he suggested that we would be several kinds of profane fools to try. His conversational tone implied that he thought we were, anyway. His sneering demeanor rankled. We were glad when he and his prophecy were gone, and glad to meet a couple of black laborers without opinions but with good muscles. We impressed them into service. They helped us dig, scrape, and carry stones. We were all fighting mad, and we all worked.

Foot by foot, we made a path for the car up the mountain and the car climbed the mountain. Gradually, we won the summit of the Santa Fe ridge. There was just one house in sight, a shack whose rough, slabbed walls were not tight enough to keep out the deluge. It was a haven of refuge to us, and the poor supper we ate that

night on the damp, storm-darkened mountain peak was to us a delectable banquet. The night was cold. We were roughly bedded on benches and in hammocks.

The farmer, like many others who have homes along isolated trails, kept a small supply of goods that might be purchased by wayfarers. We bought four cotton blankets. All through the long, restless hours, a thin-clad little black baby wailed most dismally with the cold. That was a dreary night for all of us. We knew that we had done a lot, but, measured on the map, that lot meant exactly fourteen miles. We wondered what we would do the next day. We wondered where we would have been, had we not followed the advice given us at Santa Clara, but had gone around the foot of the Santa Fes instead of over their worst passes. This, our host of the night said, we should have done, as the correct route from Santa Clara to Placetas lay in almost the opposite direction to the way we had taken.

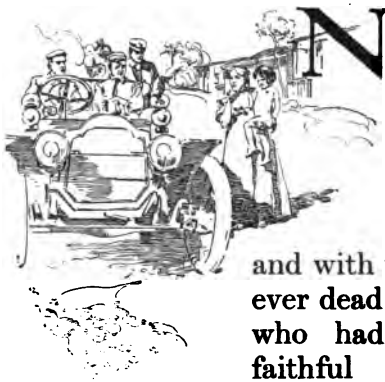
Santa Clara to Camp Santa Fe—fourteen miles.

*"We had to ford * * * a fast flowing torrent set down in a gorge * * * which had no path leading to a crossing of any kind."*

SEE PAGE 84.

CHAPTER VII

One who journeying
Along a way he knows not, having crossed
A place of drear extent, before him sees
A river rushing swiftly toward the deep,
And all its tossing current white with foam.
—Iliad.



NATIVES of sunburnt islands often are surprising. There is a type of Cuban negro, or creole, who is modeled after Adonis, muscled like Atlas, and with the disposition of whatever dead and done God it was who had the attributes of a faithful Newfoundland dog. The two men whom we had hired the previous evening came back to help us in the morning. They were on hand ere we awakened in the dark, wet dawn to put on our mud-plastered shoes and be dressed.

Before we ever started the car, we went out into the big swamps that lay between the two next hills and built a corduroy road of brush

and palm trunks. The rain had stopped for the moment, but the whole land was water-logged. While the two Cubans whacked and slashed at brush and palms, we lugged and carried and built our road. It takes skill as well as muscle to chop wood with a machete. The Cubans had both. We marveled that they could be negroes and that the strange mixture of Spanish and African blood could produce, in a southern country, such superb giants.

To get out of the mountains we had to ford two more rivers. One was a typical stream. The other was a fast-flowing torrent set down in a gorge that had once been bridged, but which now had no path leading to a crossing of any kind. Ox carts had not yet made a trail through it. Only horses had forded. It was a disappointing sight, after a week of endeavor such as ours had been. Casually, it looked like our finish. We hunted up and down its banks for a defile or a shelf that we could follow to the bottom. Two of us stripped and swam into the river, looking for a path where the uneven bed formed ledges high enough and wide enough to make a feasible route for the car to be driven across. In some places immense boulders absolutely blocked our way. From the top of the gorge a quartette of rural señoritas, apparently shocked, and yet as obviously pleased, by this unusual exhibition, peeped slyly at us through the grass.

Finally, with one of us guiding each front wheel, the car was driven slowly through the river on one of the twisted lines of rock. It was

nearly noon when we reached Camajuani. No king ever rode into his capital with finer airs. Our Cuban helpers were perched on the running boards, their russet hides gleaming in the sun and their faces beaming with pride at being a part of such an unwonted expedition. We stopped for breakfast, having had nothing except a hurried cup of very black and very dirty coffee that morning. We had come three miles. Our chests expanded. Imagine our glee when, in the café where we awaited our chicken and rice we espied our friend, the surveyor. I have this good to report of him. He swallowed his previous misjudgment of our capabilities with generous congratulations and offered to buy us a bottle of Rioja blanco.

By comparison with the sloppy, muddy ravines, the long, wiggling trail of angular rocks between Camajuani and Salamanca were, to us, a boulevard. We struck south for Placetas, being just as far away from it as when we had left Santa Clara. The stony trail gradually led to lower land, where there was nothing underneath except sloughs, gullies and rivers and nothing above except rain and a black, angry sky.

We had obtained great skill on mud holes. We could now tell the hard bottom ones from the mires without sounding. Driving to the edge of a sort of plateau, there spread before us a plashy lowland, which seemed to be nothing but a succession of marshes. On the other side rose the hazy outlines of a mountain range, but we knew what work it would take to reach those hills. We knew that the tall grass hid mud holes and ruts

where ox carts had been laboriously dragged across.

As the gloom of the rainy afternoon deepened, telling that the meager sunlight was about to disappear, we worried along past a picturesque old Spanish village, set all alone in the desolation, with its ruined cathedral another milestone in the path of the recent war. We sought a sugar mill, tucked in a corner of the distant hills. The history of two days before repeated itself. Again we sank into the mud as darkness hid our plight.

These typical pantanos, or mud holes, are simply enlargements of long, narrow rivers of mud. You may walk up and down and find no place where it is easier to pass than at any other place. Where we failed in crossing, either by driving carefully over the more solid lumps of earth or by rushing the narrowest place, there remained just one thing to do: jack up each wheel in succession and build a solid foundation of stone underneath. With all four wheels in the mud, this is a tiresome task, at sun down, in an unknown country, and away from even the trace of a town.

Once up out of the mud and going, we lost no time in driving across a field to a farmhouse we had spied. It offered no accommodation, but a short distance on the other side of a muddy river was a sugar mill. We left the car standing in the rain by the farmhouse and pushed ahead on foot, to the mill, for we were too tired and hungry to tackle the job of driving the car across the river in the darkness.

At every large sugar mill there is a laborers'

eating house, in combination with the store. Both first and second-class meals are served. We ate first class and enjoyed it. We could have eaten second class and, at least, swallowed it, for our appetites had lost all trace of daintiness.

That night we found out the true meaning of hacienda. It is a beautiful Spanish house, set in the middle of thousands of acres of sugar cane and surrounded by people who live, but appear to have no homes. As a wayfarer, you knock timidly at the door above the grand staircase which is on the outside of the house, because there is only one floor to the inside. Through the latticed window a female voice shrieks:

"Que hay!" and your interpreter reels off a thousand words of address, introduction, request, and petition.

Then a man's voice breaks out of the window, but the most beautiful Castillian rhetoric, sung by the most intelligent interpreter, cannot get him to open the door. That is an hacienda. We put up at the eating house.

Over the table on which we had eaten, we spread many layers of empty sugar bags, borrowed from the store, whereat, also, we bought some Cuban-made shoes and cigarros arroz. In the upper right-hand corner of the room there was an acetylene generator. In the lower left-hand corner was a baker's oven. Both were busy on the night shift. Between these two evils we stretched flat on our backs on the table, smoked and dropped the burnt cigarettes, one after another, on the floor of sun-dried tile. We made

jokes at our own expense and drew our cotton blankets closer about our necks as the chill of the night increased.

Toward morning we gave up the endeavor to sleep and retired to the kitchen. The charcoal fire was almost out and we piled on more fuel. We took off our shoes and some of our clothes and laid them around the edge of the fire to dry. The baker gave us fresh bread and we had the first helping of coffee, and eggs fried by dropping them into an immense pan of deep grease, which appeared to have been used on the same stove, in the same pan, for the same purpose, day in and day out for several years. Then we sat down to await daylight.

Camp Santa Fe to Camp Convenio—thirteen miles.

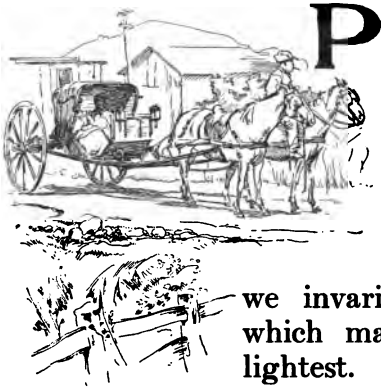
"Digging to obtain a footing for the wheels in the roughest ravines."

SEE PAGE 93.

CHAPTER VIII

When I was at home, I was in a better place;
but travellers must be content.

—As You Like It.



PEOPLE learn rapidly under the pressure of necessity. When we had begun driving over the roadless interior of Cuba we had favored the car. In crossing extremely bad places we invariably chose the route which made the car's task the lightest. Later we learned that all the car needed was traction and we began to favor ourselves.

Going back from the sugar mill, in the early morning, to the farmhouse where we had left El Toro, we noticed two chances of crossing the muggy river where automobiling in Cuba had ceased the night before. One place was wide, low, and flat. It meant long hours of tedious filling in with brush. The other was a narrow cut between two precipitous walls. We chose

the cut, for it required only a few minutes to fill the narrow bottom with enough brush to allow the car to be driven down one hillside and up the other as fast as all its power could take it.

Our underbrush pontoons were engineering triumphs. We knew exactly how much brush it required to support the car when driven rapidly over one of them. It would have been a mere waste of labor to have piled on enough brush to allow slow driving, stopping, or recrossing. The whole country was a wide morass. We were in the lowland, between two ranges of mountains. The only difference between what we called mud holes and the rest of the country, was that the mud holes had no bottom, whereas the hard ground or stone underneath the remaining miles of our travel allowed us to plow slowly through the surface mire.

Near the mill we halted before a strange and fascinating scene. A dozen heavy carts, loaded with sugar cane, that had been left outside the mill yard the night before, clogged the only available passageway to the country beyond. We sat in the car and watched a hundred men and fifty straining, tugging bulls try to get the heavy carts through the mud, in which they settled to their axles. Musical, yet vicious, pleading, yet commanding, using goad as well as voice, the violent drivers yelled at each struggling bull by name:

"Tamarindo! Canario!"

Often a dozen yelled in chorus. Failing to budge the foremost cart, all ceased their efforts

and, wildly gesticulating, argued and wrangled while more bulls were brought from a rear cart and hitched to the one stuck in the mud ahead. It took a dozen of the wide-shouldered, powerful bulls, pulling all together, with all their might, to drag each cart to the hard ground in the mill yard. In the meantime, scores of idle mill laborers, representing every type which the island affords, lounged around, dividing their attention between the curious struggle and the strange sight which we made in our motor car. While they watched with curious eyes, they pared long sugar canes with skillful flips of their machetes and sucked the thin sweetness.

At last an opening was effected. Straddling the gaping ruts, with wheels twisted to the full limit of the springs, Waldon drove the car out of the mess. Leaving behind a great babel of unintelligible tongues, we went on our way toward Placetas. Sliding down embankments, crossing pools, digging trenches to obtain a footing for the wheels in the roughest ravines, we reached the bed of a dried river, whose hard bottom held only occasional pools of water made by the recent rains. We followed this to a hill, from whose brow a level path led to Placetas.

Here was a post of the United States Army and the entire force, commissioned and enlisted, turned out to welcome us and get what home news we had to offer. For seventeen months these regulars had been in the little interior town and were glad to talk with Americans. They told us about themselves and about their

duties. They told us how they had put down insurrections without ever firing a cartridge. The Cuban is not a coward. Naturally he is a fighter, but he knows there is an awful wallop in the sinewy fist of Uncle Sam.

The soldier boys directed us to a trail, among four, at the other edge of town. We took the wrong one. After many miles of driving over the damp lowlands, with all sense of direction lost in the dark, sunless day, we learned from a passing farmer that we were going straight backward toward Santa Clara. Also, we found that we were on the trail which we should have taken before we had been sent up among the hills around Camajuani.

Retracing six or seven miles, we found an old, unused trail through the grass and mud, which looked like a short cut in the right direction. There was no variety and no town. We just plugged along in the mud, sweated under the hard work of crossing washouts, or worried through the tall, damp grass. We knew by our watches that the little daylight was about to depart, and, so, when we found a used trail, we took to it, although we had no idea where it went. At least, the trail meant a country store or a farmhouse.

Now it was raining again and we did our best to hurry toward a hut, just visible in the waning light. Almost in front of it, the front tire exploded, while warping the car over the jagged rocks of a washout. As we replaced it the interpreter negotiated with the storekeeper for

shelter and food. It proved that the whole family was sick, and that we could not come in. However, we were informed that a tobacco grower lived a mile farther on. We took the tobacco grower for granted, drove through his fences and across his fields, and lost not one minute of time making the last of our twenty-seven miles for the day. When we got to his rather pretentious hut, which had two rooms and several lesser buildings surrounding it, we told Rogelio to inform him that he was our host, was very glad to see us, and that we could have everything there was in the place to eat. We got it.

They made the meal from the ground up; killing and cleaning guinea hens, roasting and grinding coffee—for, like many other farmers, this one grew his own coffee—cooking rice, and boiling pottage.

There is every opportunity to eat well in Cuba. Where they do not eat well, it is because they do not care or know how. Chickens and guinea hens are raised without care. There is generally a guinea hen or a quail or some other fat bird wandering around the house, anxious to be shot for breakfast, dinner, or supper. Anything that you can stick into the ground will grow. It is possible to raise coffee on one side of the house and sweet potatoes on the other, bananas just outside the lean-to and potatoes in the front yard.

There is a funny touch of Cuban innocence in their potatoes. They care little for the small

ones which grow down there, and so they ship them to the United States, where the Broadway hostelries serve them as Bermudas and other varieties costing four times the usual price. In exchange, Cuba imports the vulgar Irish variety at extravagant prices and cares not that half of them have rotted away in transit. Bananas are the staple vegetable. They are rarely ripened and eaten as fruit. Generally, they are picked and cooked green, by frying, like potatoes.

The lack of household economy in eating also applies to meats. Although there is plenty of fowl and a bountiful supply of vegetables, the stock-yards of Chicago have an extensive Cuban trade in canned meats, of the doubtful, aged varieties. Domestic beef is muscular and better adapted to the pulling of ox carts than to the delectation of satiated appetites.

As we sat on the hard benches, in the dirt-floored living room, waiting for our supper, Rogelio slumbered. The three men of the establishment tried to talk with us, but we could only point to the peacefully sleeping interpreter. Although we protested, the family served our meal before it sat down to its own. They watched us eat, and then we were almost as curious and possibly as unreserved in our candid staring while we watched them eat.

The gathering was an unusual and picturesque one—planter in white starched suit, laborers in rough, nondescript garb, women in loose calico dresses, children in dirty cotton slips, a naked baby on the floor, oblivious to surroundings

while it played with a coquettish kitten, and the eldest daughter of the house eating thick pottage from a large spoon with her fingers. Let it not be considered, however, because the señorita of the far-away tobacco plantation uses her fingers to segregate the meat from the soup, that she is a spurious señorita. She has the ordinary and universal charm of the backwoods maiden everywhere. You will notice that literature always is prone to get human interest by ringing in a peasant lass, a milkmaid, or some other daughter of the untonsured meadows. I simply imitate literature by offering an olive-tinted señorita who shyly glances over a huge spoon, from which she picks out choice chunks of chicken with her more or less dainty fingers.

It was a big family for such a small house, and they told us we might sleep in the tobacco store house. Señorita and señora departed to prepare our beds. Returning, they beamed hospitably, and said that they had made better provision for us, in another building close to hand. Waldon, with the lighted side lamp in one hand, gallantly accompanied the ladies as they escorted us to our bedchamber. He lost his gallantry and nearly dropped the lamp when his glance followed its feeble rays into the shed.

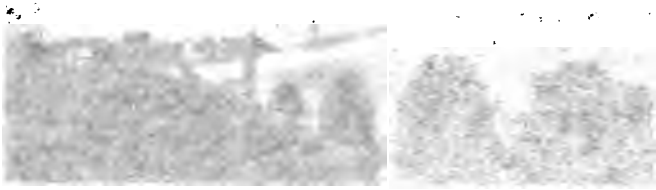
"Carajo!—and then some in English! Fellows, it's a pig pen!"

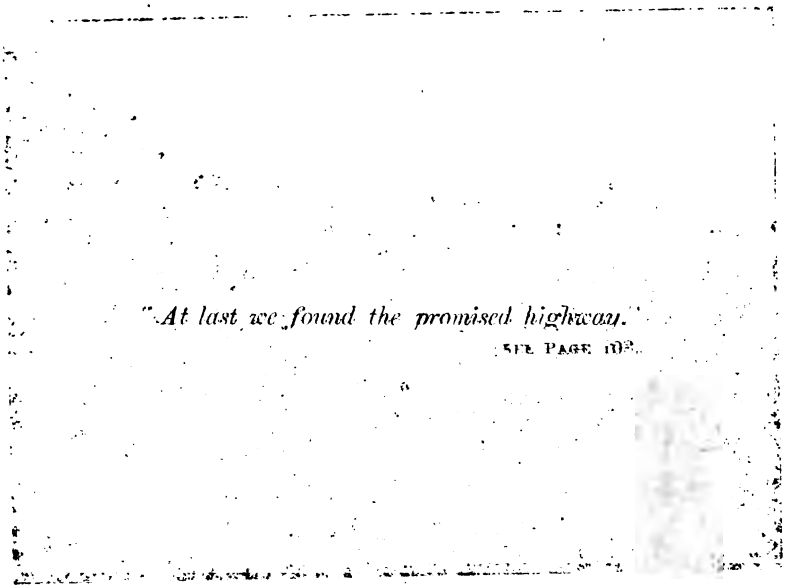
He was right. One half the interior was fenced off by a few slabs. Back of the fence were a dozen grunting pigs. In front of the fence were piles of corn. Above the pigs was a

platform on which was piled more corn. Two hammocks were swung on what Crebbin, who still had a laugh in him, naively called the mezzanine floor. On the ground floor were two more hammocks.

We matched for the mezzanine beds and retired. Outside, it rained. Inside, the pigs grunted. We made merry. Sleeping with pigs was more nearly a joke than a hardship. We repeated the name of the locality to ourselves, "Casa Cinco." Never will we forget Casa Cinco. Bent like half-opened jack knives, in canvas hammocks, we talked and laughed, and laughed and talked, and fell asleep to the lullaby of grunting swine.

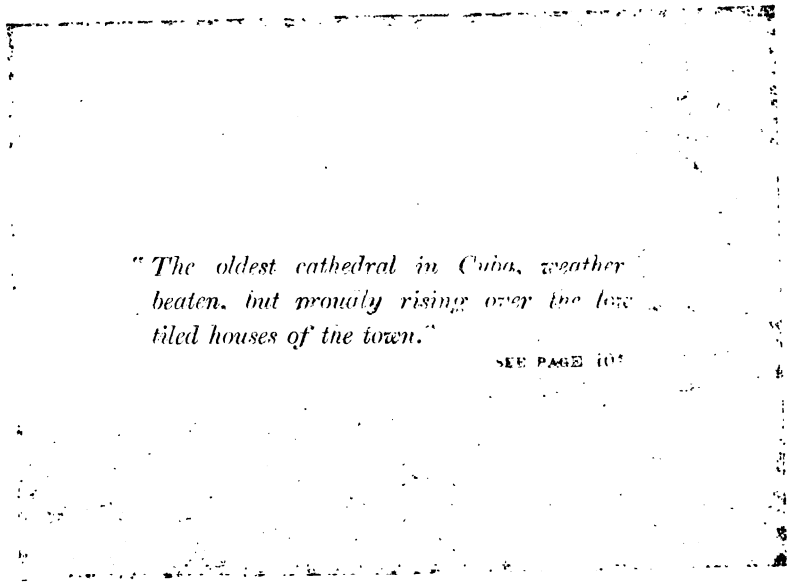
Camp Convenio to Casa Cinco — twenty-seven miles.





"At last we found the promised highway."

SEE PAGE 103

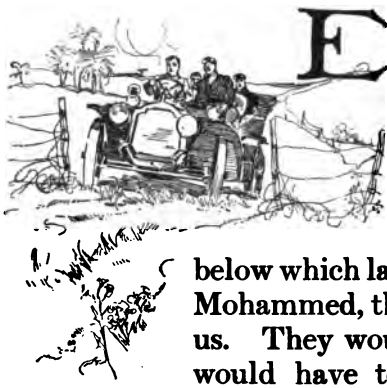


"The oldest cathedral in Cuba, weather beaten, but proudly rising over the low tiled houses of the town."

SEE PAGE 103

CHAPTER IX

Deficit omne quod nascitur.
—Quintilian.



EASTWARD lay La Gloria, Del Tuerto, De Caballete. Three mountains, like any other mountains, sticking into the clouds. Three mountains, below which lay Sancti Spiritus. Like Mohammed, the mountains had it on us. They would not come to us; we would have to go to them. The mountains were not visible in the morning, but the planter said they were there. We asked him where was Sancti Spiritus, and he said to go to the mountains. We asked him how far was Sancti Spiritus, and he shook his head. We started for the mountains, determined to reach Sancti Spiritus that day regardless of conditions, distance, or direction.

The same old acts were rehearsed with new scenery. Down gullies we twisted to wide rivers, forded them and scrambled up the banks,

only to drop again into marsh or perform on the high spots over ruts that the rain could not wash out, but which it made slippery beyond description. We did a lot of driving through fields. Where there were fences, they were either of stone or barbed wire. The latter consisted of two or three loosely drawn strands of wire, held by an occasional permanent post, but, principally, by loose sticks. We cut the wires with pliers, dropped the fence, drove into the field, picked up the fence, joined its loose ends as best we could and drove on. In order to go a mile or two we sometimes had to pass through a dozen fields and cut a dozen fences. The fields which we preferred to the trail were either plowed ground or simply rough land which never had been tilled. Always, it was covered with stones and it was never level.

Through the beating rain we rose to the top of the ridge which had framed our view, and saw, behind us, laid out as on a map, the last river we had forded and, in front of us, the next one we would have to ford. Away over at the right, sharp-nosed Pico Tuerto jutted skyward from between its squatter brothers, Caballete and Gloria. Each successive hill became higher. Each was flat topped like a small plateau. Between them were swamps.

A loquacious dissembler at a small town said that a macadam road, a relic of early Spanish days, started at the next hill and ran straight to Sancti Spiritus. With tire chains broken and breaking, as they were dragged over the scraggy roads, climb after climb, descent after descent,

we kept at it, in the pouring rain, looking for that road just at the top of the next hill. It was like trying to catch up with to-morrow. Sancti Spiritus was near. We knew that, but night was getting nearer. We fretted at delay and took unusual chances on the hills. Sancti Spiritus assumed the aspect of a myth.

About the time we had given up hope for the day, we found a bridge and then another, and, at last, we found the promised highway. It was worn and full of holes, but it was high, hard, and almost level. The clouds parted and the sun beamed a bright farewell, just before it dropped from sight behind the mountains. High on a neighboring crest was silhouetted against the glowing, copper-colored sky a lone block house. Below it, between a pair of spreading laurels, stood the ruins of a great mansion which had been the quarters of some luckless Spanish general who allowed the Cubans to shoot him out of house and home. A massive stone bridge, weathered by the many years throughout which it had served generation after generation, led us over the last river. We climbed the last hill. Below us spread the red roofs of Sancti Spiritus.

The town received us boisterously. Each crooked street filled with noisy crowds of men, women, and children, who darted from their homes to chase after us to the hotel, even as though there was nothing else in Sancti Spiritus to think of that evening. Sancti Spiritus was innocent in automobiles, but it had heard of us. By mail had come the Santa Clara paper, telling about

the Americans in the automobile which was named El Toro.

In the immense bedroom of the ancient hotel, while we waited for water to be brought that we might wash, we sat on the edges of the canopied beds, looked at each other, and merely laughed. There was something ridiculous in being there. The adventure was over. We had come to the mountains.

Why? Because.

The story of Saturday, loitered away in this peculiar and venerable town, is another story. Dressed in odds and ends of garments picked up at the local stores, to replace the mud-covered, tattered clothes we had worn continuously for a week and a half, we strayed around its crooked streets, posed in the plaza that the wondering children might gaze upon us, and lounged in the hotel courtyard among the flowers. Across the corner from the plaza stands the oldest cathedral in Cuba, weatherbeaten, but proudly rising over the low tiled houses of the town. It represents a civilization and an art which is wasted on the reconstructed Cuban. The latter has no apparent reverence for the picturesque architecture and the quaint religious figures housed within its crumbling walls.

The Supreme Being of that vicinity was Captain Wise. His headquarters were on a hill overlooking the town, and he commanded a company of United States marines, who had built comfortable quarters and spent their time going through the motions of military life, playing baseball and

performing the duties of an army of pacification in charge of a lot of scrappy islanders, who, from el Señor Alcalde to el peon, were, after all, nothing but spiggoties in the eyes of an American private soldier.

It was good to be among these child-like American boys. We had done a little fighting ourselves, of a different kind. We had gone through districts where all Cuba said we could not go. We had accomplished the impossible and were satisfied. Mingled with our pride, however, was a new respect for these greatest of soldiers, and, like them, having done what we had come to do, we wanted to go home. There was a little bit of extra sentiment that night, with all of the Americans in the place gathered at headquarters, waiting for retreat to sound, when, under La Gloria's shadow, at the sinking of the sun, the stars-and-stripes dropped upon the blood-red soil of new-old Cuba.

Now for the anti-climax, for it is an anti-climax to load an automobile onto a flat car, in the darkness which shrouds such a town as Sancti Spiritus. It is an anti-climax to be dragged away at dawn by a wheezy engine over the wabbly, rusted tracks of a stray branch railway. It is an anti-climax to sit at a wayside station like Zaza del Medio, waiting for the daily train to Havana, that gay decoy which draws tourists to Cuba. It is an anti-climax, after one has come hundreds of miles in an automobile over land which no vehicle was ever meant to traverse, and, then, at the sight of a fussing, careening sample of a railway train, to

dig deep into your pockets for the wherewithal to purchase a mere ticket. We had left on hand little of the coin of the realm—any old realm, Spanish or American. So, trying to forget who and when and where we came from, we gave up our little mite for seats in the second-class carriage.

All night we sat in frozen silence by the open windows, eying in tired disgust the dirty black Cubans who shared our torture. We had not come for this, but now we realized what we had come for. We had come to make good on the roadless wastes. This railway coach was not Cuba; the Cuba we knew was over at Casa Cinco, where the pig pens have mezzanine floors and serve as hotels. We were going back to Havana. Havana was not Cuba; Cuba was at the top of the Santa Fe mountains, where the rain washes the traveler's hopes down the hillside and leaves him staring into the dark, cold night, speculating on the whereabouts of Camajuani.

Trundling along behind, on a flat car, was an automobile. It was more than an automobile, as it had an identity of its own. It was El Toro. There were no other Packards like it. It had done more than we had done, for we simply had given it a chance. We simply were engineers in traction. We had found a path. Surely the Cubans had named it right, when they called it The Bull.

In the morning we would find Havana, money, new clothes, passage to the United States and the frozen north from whence we had come.

What of it?

You can't railroad memory. Technically, we were leaving Cuba. In reality, we stayed; stayed there where our recollections were and where we had learned the greatness of a philosophy which makes a man do things—just because. Some day we are going back, we hope. Some day, when the new government has spent its thirty millions of dollars and built its many highways. We are going back to rush over the country in El Toro; to dash, in reckless flight, by the same places where we struggled up the hills inch by inch.

Why? Just because.

Casa Cinco to Sancti Spiritus — twenty-eight miles.
Havana to Sancti Spiritus — 313 miles.