WEST-INDIAN GORILLAS.

BY FELIX L. OSWALD.

Slaves, like the hounds of Actaeon, have often torn their own masters, and the reaction against extremes of despotism is apt to evolve monsters more savagely destructive than any beast of the wilderness.

The vandals of the Peasants' war and the Furies of the French Revolution wrought more havoc than the ten-fold number of tigers could have perpetrated under the stimulus of ravenous hunger; but in Cuba that werewolf-producing tendency of long-continued oppression has been aggravated by a perhaps unparalleled concurrence of circumstances.

The grip of the strangler relaxed before his victim had been choked into helpless submission, and nowhere else on earth has nature so favored the protraction of guerrilla warfare. Seven-tenths, or nearly thirty thousand square miles, of the great mountain island, are still covered with jungle-forests, as indestructible as superstition, and the thinly-wooded highlands abound with caves and ravines where superior topographical knowledge can baffle the resources of civilised warfare as easily as the military genius of Marshal Soult was baffled by the fox-trail instinct of Pancho Zapirrote.

"Revolutions," said Edmond About, "seem to prosper only under the sign of the Dog-star, and governments that can hold their own to the day of the first sleet-storm, are generally safe." But in the Spanish West-Indies the fighting-season, par excellence, coincides with that of our wapiti stags. The skies clear in November, and bright, breezy weather, just cool enough to make outdoor exercise pleasant, continues till the middle of April, in dry years often to the beginning of May. Then comes the season of afternoon showers, but the alternation of rain-storms and brooding heat kills
ten foreigners to one native, and the hides of habitués seem to become insect proof to the degree that mosquito bites at last cease to fester.

And in Cuba harbor-blockades fail to affect the commissariat of a bushwhacker camp. There are some two hundred varieties of wild-growing fruits and nuts in the woods, and the lack of game has been remedied by the introduction of two highly prolific species of quadrupeds. Rabbits swarm in the mountain-glens, and in the jungles of the coast-plain runaway pigs have multiplied like our Washington office-seekers, till their grunts can be heard hail ing the first shower of every thunder-storm.

Moreover, no more ominous mixture of revolutionary races could have been compounded in the borderland of Islam and militant Christianity. The Spanish guerrilla penchant has been developed in the course of a six hundred years' warfare against the power of the Moorish invaders, and both the negroes and true aborigines (the West-Indian Lucayans) have wrongs to avenge that can palliate the most horrible atrocities with a plea of retributive justice.

For nearly twenty years the Spaniards themselves have set an example of barbarous warfare, and some of the ogres engendered by the process of an inevitable reaction may be truly said to represent the lowest depth of moral degeneration to which any species of the human race has thus far been reduced.

"Alcoholised gorillas," a Havana press-reporter calls the hordes of mongrel bushwhackers that have come to enjoy their predatory mode of existence for its own sake, and thousands of whom seem, indeed, to combine the vices of civilisation with the bestial instincts of a savage ancestry.

In the latter respect their habits might afford data for an interesting biological study. If it is true that "runaway men and beasts tend to revert to the primitive type of their species," the propensities of the Cuban mosstroopers would appear to indicate that our semi-animal forefathers must have been gregarious, nomadic, unclean and polygamous creatures, home-making only to the degree of weather-shed building, and as improvident as the tree-climbing apes that roam from forest to forest, declining to trouble themselves with the anticipated cares of the morrow or precautions against a possible season of scarcity. They must have been fiercely impatient of restraint, and in submissive to prestige except that of superior physical strength.

But to those characteristics of the savage the Cuban gorillas
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add superstition, intemperance, and destructiveness. They laugh at priests but have failed to emancipate themselves from the dread of evil omens.

"Everything goes wrong to-day," said the leader of a discomfited horde in the Sierra de Cobre, "I knew that this morning when that cursed black bush-paceant crossed our road, just as we turned the first bend. "Sempre llevan novelades," "they always bring trouble," he added for the information of his American travelling companions, "there is nothing worse in the morning except a limping dog. If you see one of them you might as well turn back and hide in a thicket till the next morning sun peeps over the sierras." Nearly all the native bushwhackers carry amulets and tell marvellous stories of hairbreadth escapes effected by the influence of miraculous images. Colonel Holgar of the Santa Clara brigade had even a body-guard of amulet immunes, proprietors of time-tested, extra-efficient luck-charms, that would avert anything from a hornet to a howitzer-shell.

Ghosts of departed comrades can be consulted at certain hours of the night, but must be addressed in deprecatory terms, even if they should have been hung in the interest of regimental welfare, for an insult to a departed spirit will result in midnight screams and other sleep-disturbing noises.

A day inaugurated by a golden twilight—"Un este dorado," guarantees the success of any expedition. The day following the new moon is also highly auspicious, but it seems that the Cubanos do not trouble themselves about subdivisions of a calendar-month. "Raiding? A plundering foray this morning? Isn't this Sunday, gentlemen?" asked Mr. Thomas Esterman at the officer's mess of Camp Barrancas. One of the "officers" stopped munching mule-meat long enough to look round with an expression of surprise. "Sunday? Don't know," he grunted, "who the demonio can bother himself with such nonsense in a situation like ours?"—though a few days after he did worry considerably about the hooting of an oriya, or dwarf-owl, in the rocks overhanging the camping-ground.

And though indifferent to spiritual consolations, those champions of independence seem to be rather partial to spirituous comforts. They brew intoxicants from all sorts of wild-growing berries and will risk their lives to intercept a cargo of aguardiente, or Spanish plum brandy. And if the raid succeeds, they will haul their prize to some out-of-the-way mountain-cave where they can hope to be left alone in their glory and get "drunk to the limit," i. e.,
keep under the influence of their favorite tipple while the supply lasts. Neither business nor politics are allowed to interfere with such foretastes of paradise, for the Utopia of the future, the consummation of El Gorilla's daydreams of better times to come, will consist in the advent of an era when every son of freedom will be allotted a sufficient share of war-spoils to devote his remaining days, to monte y mescal—dice and distilled liquors,—hardly an improvement on the panes et circenses ideal of the Roman idler.

Among the survivors of the Reconcentrado camps and exile colonies there are Cuban patriots worthy of that name, self-sacrificing pioneers in the struggle for independence, liberals who would undoubtedly sacrifice their last peseta and last drop of blood to free their island of sorrow from the after-effects of misgovernment.

But it is likewise certain that the semi-organised bushwhackers who roam the Sierras under the command of such leaders as Bandera and Pedro Parras are not the worst of the pronunciamiento-mongers. Besides the recognised subdivision of the Republican army, with all its attachés and volunteers, there are freelance hordes of dusky desperadoes, the Gorillas proper, who issue proclamations only in the form of blackmail messages and seem to suspect the political proclivities of every property-holder. They brag louder than their Caucasian fellow-citizens and daub their flags with big crosses; but filthier, greedier and more brutal barbarians never marched under the banners of Genseric and Ali Pasha. They fuddle with cicuta, or swamp-hemlock, when other poisons are unattainable, and by way of variety seek excitement in murder and devastation. At their approach, the poor ranchers of the hill-country flee to the shelter of the tangle-forests to save their lives and their daughters' honor, but at the risk of their little remains of property being destroyed to the last banana-sprout. In the rage of their disappointment the vicious baboons will exhaust the opportunities for mischief, and probably pile up the furniture of the poor cabin to cremate a dog that has tried to defend the property of his absent master.

Countless swarms of those bestialised bushwhackers still infest the eastern half of the island, and will not fail to continue their "retributive raids" under the new era of the American protectorate. Even now proclamations against the despotism of the foreign usurpers mingle with the demands for vendetta privileges, and the gorillas of the Santiago highlands will not long content themselves with the laments which a correspondent of El Pays parodies in his "Woes of the Patriots."
"Mourn ye the day when those barbarians landed on our shores," wails the West-Indian Jeremiah. "The day before yesterday one of their bullies actually kicked a son of freedom whom he had caught in the act of removing the personal estate of a Spanish miscreant."

"Gangs of ruffians," he informs his sympathisers, "patrol the public highways and prevent us from reaping the just fruits of victory. A troop of peninsular catiffs who had deserved annihilation and whom our friends tried to relieve of their spoils, were assisted by these pestilential foreigners, and enabled to hang three of our heroic brethren. Two of them, indeed, were cut down in time to prevent the worst, but their organs of respiration are so impaired that they cannot even redress their wrongs by oratorical efforts, and may be obliged to adopt some menial trade—possibly under the supervision of those alien usurpers. Oh, Reconstruction! what crimes are being committed in thy name!"

"Last week the stronghold of an enemy of mankind, a Spanish Real Estate Pasha, was set afire, and lovers of liberty would have hailed the fiery beacon as a promise of better times, but the henchmen of our hyperborean oppressors rushed in to extinguish the flames. They were armed with sticks, and after seizing our emissary—but details are too painful to mention. Four of his aggressors then laid hold of him, and Freedom shrieked when he fell out of a second-story window."

"Time, the all-healer, seems to have no remedy for our woes. Appeals only tend to rivet the chains of our subjugation. Less than a month ago our tyrants enacted a by-law threatening with arrest and fines all armed individuals found on the public streets after 10 p. m. Patron spirits of liberty, have we sunk so low? Was it for this we collected 1,500,000 pesetas to bribe the politicians of that ruthless nation? How shall we vindicate our sacred liberties?"

The Knights of the Foray will answer that question in a manner of their own. Signal-fires will herald the movements of every American convoy, of every stage-coach and mail-train. The defiles of the highlands will bristle with ambuscades. American colonists will have to entrench the approaches of their ranchos and transport their produce under military escort. Isolated settlers will be murdered without option of blackmail. Predatory cutthroats will infest every highway from Santiago to Trinidad, and at the approach of a patrol will vanish more inconceivably than the Circassian insurgents who defied the power of the Russian Empire for twenty-eight
years. Cuba Libre will become a rendezvous for desperadoes from all parts of Spanish America.

The bushwhacker chieftains will make common cause against the enemies of freedom, and their list of grievances will be steadily enlarged. They will appeal to nativist prejudices against the obnoxious intruders. Shall the Sons of the Cid submit to a squad of red-haired Hyperboreans, the hereditary enemies of their race? In the ardor of his patriotism El Gorilla will become pious, like the Neapolitan brigands in King Murat's time, and denounce the heretical foreigners in the name of a dozen aboriginal saints. On the smaller islands of the Spanish West-Indies similar causes will lead to similar effects, but under the auspices of topographical facilities anarchy will probably be strangled within a year.

"It may have puzzled you," said Dr. Leon Artega of the Porto Rico Liberals, "how we contrived to keep the peace for so many years, though we were not better treated than our Cuban neighbors, nor specially fond of European garrisons; but the simple solution can be found in the circumstance that the natural resources of Cuba offer unrivalled facilities for baffling invaders that could overpower Porto Rico in a week."

American colonists and American enterprise will make Porto Rico the true Pearl of the Antilles, while Cuba, like Sicily and San Domingo, will probably have to be classed with the lost Edens of our Planet.