

DIARY OF A SPRING HOLIDAY IN CUBA

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Diary of a Spring Holiday in Cuba by Richard J. Levis

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RICHARD J. LEVIS

**DIARY OF A SPRING
HOLIDAY IN CUBA**

DIARY

OF A

Spring Holiday

IN

CUBA.



PHILADELPHIA:
PORTER & COATES.
1872.

TO
THOSE WHO WILL BE, FOR MY SAKE,
ITS MOST INTERESTED READERS,

My Aged Parents,

THIS SIMPLE RECORD OF TROPICAL WANDERING
IS AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED.

DIARY

OF A

Spring Holiday in Cuba.

STEAMSHIP JUNIATA,
AT SEA OFF THE CAPES OF DELAWARE BAY,
Saturday Evening, Feb. 24th, 1872.

BOUND for a land of perpetual summer, we take a farewell backward look at the dark and frowning sky of winter. A cold gray mist blurs the outline of the ice-bound shores, where the black gulls of winter flap their broad wings over the surf. A chill north wind blows, but it only hastens us southward toward sunlit seas and radiant skies. The last glimpse of the dim shore of homeland fades away, and our thoughts turn, as the prow of the vessel points, to the warm and genial South

Sunday, February 25th.—Sailors have a traditional saying, that there is "no Sunday beyond five fathoms soundings," and it is apparent that the day has no formal characteristic at sea.

The wind is light, and the waves give us but a gentle swaying motion; yet it is enough to keep our fellow-passengers in their state-rooms, on account of sea-sickness. So the day passes quietly away, while we gradually become accustomed to the new surroundings of sight, sound, and motion; the deep respiration of the steam-exhaust, the pulsating throbs and heavy strokes of the engine, sending a tremor through the frame of this great sea monster; the solemn tone of the ship's bell, repeated every half hour; and, to us, a bell, increasing hourly in attractions, which calls us to the well-spread cabin table. The sea continues so quiet that there would seem to be no cause for sea-sickness, but the captain states that the ailment is much under the influence of the imagination, as passengers often repeat the inquiry as to whether we are "outside yet,"

and on being answered in the affirmative, retire to their state-rooms and go through the formalities.

Yet there must be a miserable reality in sea-sickness, which requires great resignation to bear it patiently. A gentleman, whose histrionic fame is known to every one, being at sea and suffering from sea-sickness, which he bore with extreme impatience, a fellow-passenger strove to console him with the example of other and more resigned sufferers, and even alluded to the Saviour's being at sea in a tempest. The petulant invalid replied: "That is so; but, if my memory is not at fault, he got out and walked! and I cannot do that."

This starting out to sea reminds me of my only previous experience, in a time long ago, when with feelings different indeed I first saw the ocean's expanse. I recall vividly, but with a shade of sadness, an affectionate parting on starting off, youthful, buoyant, and careless. Then life seemed an endless morning, and the vista an unlimited horizon. The present voyaging seems

as but a mid-day rest in a toilsome way; or, perhaps, with the day, it may be, far spent, when I should be looking trustingly forward as being

"Nearer to the wayside inn,
Where toil shall cease and rest begin."

Of one of that little home-circle there is nothing left but her memory; the snow of this parting winter is melting on the marble that encloses her, and the slanting rays of a glowing winter sunset are smiling over her repose.

Tuesday, February 27th.—If the "three wise men of Gotham," of infantile literature, who "went to sea in a bowl," had chosen this auspicious time their story would have been longer. The sea continues as the quiet surface of a mill-pond; even the traditional stormy locality of "off Cape Hatteras," is passed without wind or waves. The sun shines warmly, the sky is a deep blue, and the air is like the balmy breath of June. This transition from the cheerless breaking up of winter, from fields of floating ice to the drift-

ing seaweeds of the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, is exceedingly grateful.

Thursday, February 29th.—The sea has still an unruffled surface, and evidences of the tropical change are increasing; the sun comes up red from its hot-bath in the gulf waters, and glows in a cloudless sky until it dips again in the crimson west.

There is a tranquilizing influence in this warm sea air of the South, which tends to mental repose and an idle and dreamy existence. It is occupation enough to lie on deck and gaze on the blue expanse; to watch the heavy flight of the pelicans, the wayward flapping of the gulls, the antics of the flying-fish, or the wind-borne fleets of nautilus.

The vessel has been since yesterday morning running along the coast of Florida, near enough to discern persons, if any existed on that barren strand; but with the exception of several lonely light-houses, and, in the evening, some Indian camp-fires, no signs of human life were seen.

Some wrecked vessels loom up as ghostly warn-