

the skill and expertness of the helmsmen will not avail to extricate the State vessel from the surrounding shoals.

"I have already spoken favourably of Las Casas, one of the best of the Captains-General. He took a deep interest in the welfare of the Colony, and, like his ancestor, the celebrated Don Bartolomew Las Casas, spent his time in laying the foundation of Cuba's prosperity. His memory is still revered by the Havanese: they are grateful for the services rendered to their ancestors. This man was a philanthropist, an agriculturist, a botanist, a scholar, and a diplomatist. He founded a school for the orphans of the destitute; he established a public library, and the first periodical. In short, his whole life was spent in doing good, and he died universally regretted.

"General Vivis, his successor, was a kind-hearted but indolent man; he humoured the creoles during the ten years that he governed the island, without rendering them any essential services. His successor, Ricaforte, trod in his footsteps. He flattered the nobility—pandered to the wealthy in their gambling propensities, whereby dens of sin and iniquity sprung up like mushrooms in every part of the city. Assassinations increased to a frightful extent; it was no uncommon sight to see five or six persons lying murdered in the streets. That which must surprise Europeans, and Englishmen in particular, is the fact, that whenever an assassination takes place, every one rushes from the spot; none dare render assistance, fearful lest accusation fall upon the good Samaritan. The doors of the neighbouring houses are instantly closed, the inmates cast furtive glances through the solidly-grated windows, and if a stray passer-by approach the spot, a dozen voices warn him to retrace his steps. Meanwhile the victim of revenge is left to welter in his blood; and when the police arrive to inquire into the cause, the assassin has escaped, and the wounded man is dead or dying.

"The social position of the island was critical in the extreme, owing to the want of judgment and energy of Generals Vivis and Ricaforte. The inhabitants were beoming daily more demoralised: the law was no longer respected; there was no security for persons, nor the property of individuals—even the tranquillity of the island was threatened by a formidable party anxious to throw off the yoke of Spain, and declare themselves independent. Bands of bravos, such as walked about the square of St. Marc, at Venice, in her palmy days, might be seen prowling about the streets of the Havana, ready to sell their services to revenge and hatred. Upwards of fifty gambling-houses invited the thoughtless, the profligate, and the wealthy to ruin their health and their fortunes within their accursed walls. These hells were not unfrequently the scenes of bitter strife and bloodshed. So great was the demoralisation that a number of degraded wretches could be hired at a moment's notice to appear before the tribunals as false witnesses, and in order that those who required their services might recognise them, they had fixed upon certain signs, whereby they made themselves known. The jurisdiction of the island, on the other hand, was confided to individuals who thought more of their own interest than that of the public; the judges, for the most part, were ignorant men, and the lawyers, as a matter of course,