

## **Myths & Legends of our New Possessions & Protectorate by Charles M. Skinner**

### How Havana Got its Market

It does not take long to erect a reputation when it has a basis of desert. An odd modern instance is told in the case of an American newspaper reporter, John C. Klein, who, after ten years of absence, was canonized by the Samoans, among whom he had lived for some years, as a hero in battle, a slayer of Germans, and a wizard who closed his own wounds by magic. The gods approved him, and the people in their trouble prayed for the return of Talaini o le Meleke (Klein, the American) to rescue them. And with Tacon it took hardly longer to become a sort of national hero. The qualities he showed in reforming, building, extending, and protecting Havana were so unusual that the people willingly credited others to him he may not have possessed. He has become legendary already.

Tacon, after gathering in two thousand of the riff-raff and putting them at work on roads, piers, and prisons, applied himself with special energy to the suppression of Marti, the most daring, yet the slyest and most cautious of all the robbers in the country. He and his band thought no more of splitting the weasand of a soldier than tossing off a glass of brandy, and the people were more than half his friends, because he joined smuggling to his other industries, and was therefore able to provide them with many necessities, such as wine and bandanas, at a price much lower than they commanded in the shops. Yet the secret agents, the constabulary, and the troops began to make it perilous for these law-breakers, and General Tacon was hopeful of their speedy capture. On a certain morning he looked up abstractedly from some letters he was writing on the case of Marti and was astonished to see a burly but well-dressed stranger standing before his desk. "How in the devil did you get in here, sir, unannounced?" he asked, in some irritation.

"I come on secret business," replied the other, in a lower tone.

"Ha! About ----"

"Exactly. About Marti."

"Speak, then. You will not be overheard. What do you know?"

"First, your Excellency, let us understand the situation. There is a large reward for this man, is there not?"

"There is. Capture him and the money is yours. Ah, I see! You wish to turn state's evidence. So much the better. You shall be protected."

"But suppose I had been associated with the worst of these men? Suppose I had committed crimes? Suppose I had been a leader?"

"Even in that case you shall be protected."

"Give me your word, as an officer and a gentleman, that, no matter what my offences have been, I shall have an official pardon when I put you on the track of the outlaws."

"You must earn the pardon. If you know the haunts of the smugglers we shall expect you to pilot us to every one of them."

"I will do it. I am tired of an evil life, tired of hiding, tired of fear, tired of hate. I wish to come back and live among men."

"Well spoken. And Marti?"

"I shall be pardoned, absolutely, when I bring him here?"

"Absolutely. When may we expect him?"

"Now."

"Where?"

"Here."

"What! To-day? This Marti ----"

"You are looking at him."

Tacon started, and his glance fell on a couple of pistols that lay on the desk before him. He always kept them there, primed and loaded. Marti smiled, drew from beneath his coat two larger ones, handsomely mounted with silver, and placed them on the desk. "I am through with them," said he.

Tacon looked at him almost with admiration. "You begin well," he admitted, "and you shall have your pardon. But until you have fulfilled your promise and helped us to break up these bands of smugglers and--ah----"

"Oh, speak out: Thieves! That is right."

"Well, thieves,--we must keep you under guard."

"I am satisfied; only, let us get to work as soon as possible, and have the business over."

"We will start to-morrow."

Marti was placed in a large room in a hotel under watch of the constabulary, but free to order any comfort or luxury he could pay for. On the very next morning he set out with a posse of soldiers and visited all the resorts of his former associates in the vicinity. The fellows had evidently suspected something, for they had made off. Their haunts being thus disclosed, however, much of their plunder was afterward recovered, and Marti's surrender having left them without a leader, they retreated to distant provinces, and safety and peace were restored to the island.

If Marti had any misgivings as to the certainty of his pardon after this exploit, he did not show them. He returned to General Tacon's office as cool and self-possessed as if he were running a boat-load of spirits under the noses of the customs officers.

"You have been true to your part of the agreement," said the general, "and I will be to mine. Here is your pardon, signed and sealed, and this is my order on the treasury for the reward for your arrest. Sly dog!"

"I accept the pardon with gratitude, your Excellency, but I do not need the money. My country is poor. Let her keep it. I am rich. Never mind how I became so. Yet, if I may claim a reward, give me a monopoly of the fisheries on this coast. Havana will not suffer if your generosity takes this form."

And it did not. He got the fisheries, but he spent his profits freely, and one of the first of his benefactions was the construction of a market that had no superior in beauty and fitness elsewhere in the world.