

## Thomas Estrada Palma & The First President of Cuba

His  
Peculiar  
Fitness  
for  
His New  
Position.

Something of the Interesting Life of This Man Who  
Has Been Soldier, Diplomat and Scholar.

**H**OW singularly destiny, by a strange combination of events beyond the control or direction of human purpose or plan, sometimes sets a man aside for a time until the supreme opportunity arrives and he is suddenly and unexpectedly called to fill a place which it had been thought another was to occupy. Then that which the keenest prophet had failed clearly to anticipate is accepted by all as the most natural and fitting thing in the world, and it is seen how events and circumstances, guided by an overruling Providence, have conspired to specially fit and prepare for the discharge of the responsibilities of the new duty.

Senor Tomas Estrada Palma has been elected as the first president of the new republic of Cuba. What was hardly considered a possibility, if thought of at all, during the heat of the Cuban revolution and the Spanish-American war, has, by the irresistible course of events, come to exist in actual fact.

Over 30 years ago, during the Ten Years' war for Cuban independence from 1868 to 1878, Palma fought with the revolutionists, became a general in the Cuban army and was elected president of the provisional government es-

In consultation with President Roosevelt, Governor General Wood, who came from Havana to Washington for that especial purpose, and his advisers, it has been arranged with the Cuban officials that the formal inauguration of President-elect Palma and the establishment of the Cuban republic shall take place on the 20th day of May, when the United States forces will be withdrawn from the island at once and the Cubans given full control of their government. In regard to his policy in administering the affairs of the island, President Palma says:

"It shall be my aim to strengthen the friendly feeling which exists between Cuba and the United States. The people will understand each other better and reciprocity will come. A low duty on sugar and tobacco in return for low duties on machinery and fabrics would be to the advantage of both countries—Cuba has had enough of politics; now she will go to work. Before the war she produced annually 1,000,000 tons of sugar; when the cultivation of sugar and tobacco is placed on a profitable basis Cuba can turn her attention to other things which flourish in her climate. Although she has mineral resources, she is preeminently an agricultural country."



THOMAS ESTRADA PALMA.

established by the insurgents. Toward the close of the war he was captured by the Spaniards and taken as prisoner to Spain, where he was held in confinement, steadfastly refusing to take the oath of allegiance to the crown. It was not until some time after the final termination of the Ten Years' war that Palma regained his liberty, and then only with the confiscation of his estates and perpetual banishment from the island. After his release he traveled in Spanish-American countries and finally settled in Honduras. There he married the daughter of the president of that republic and became postmaster general. Subsequently he came to New York with his wife and one little child and for 18 years has resided at Central Valley, in Orange county, N. Y., about 40 miles from the city of New York. Here he established a school for Spanish-American boys, which met with marked success, until the duties of the Cuban junta called him to New York.

Such in rapid outline is the history of the man who has been called to guide Cuba's ship of state on the troubled, uncertain seas of national political life. Now it is easy to point out the special qualifications which fit Mr. Palma for his duties. His travels, his long residence in the United States, his separation from the heat and strife of the long and dreadful struggle through which Cuba has passed, his freedom from any bias as the result of his opportunity to study events from a distance and to clearly judge the services which the United States has rendered the island, his management of the affairs of the Cuban junta at New York and his calm, clear judgment in avoiding complications and indiscretions which would have compromised the cause of Cuba, these circumstances all indicate how well-equipped President Palma is to perform the task which lies before him.

While the war was still on and it was seen that a new republic was to be established in the island under the protection and supervision of the United States, it was but natural for Americans to conclude that the first president of Cuba would be picked from the military heroes, and Gens. Gomez and Maceo were both thought of in this connection. But the former declared he had no ambition for political office, and as time went on it became apparent that Gomez was shaping things in Cuba for the nomination of Palma. Last summer he visited his old friend in his home at Central Valley and secured his consent to become a candidate, and his election followed.

President Palma is most practical in his aims and methods, he is modest and unassuming, dignified and reserved, yet democratic in thought and temperament and easy of access. Since under the Platt amendment the United States guarantees the position of Cuba, President Palma remarks that the new republic will have no occasion for an army or a navy, and therefore no need of a secretary of war or a secretary of the navy in the cabinet. Nor does he see the necessity for establishing an elaborate diplomatic service; and at first he would have simply an efficient representative in the United States, with consular agents at such points as trade conditions might absolutely require. His first great object will be to establish favorable trade relations with the United States.

Next it is his ambition to continue the educational work so well begun during the United States' occupation of the island. It is fortunate indeed that one who realizes the high value of education to a people has been elected to direct the policy and best interests of Cuba. Palma's long connection with his school at Central Valley has specially fitted him to accomplish the most for the people of Cuba along educational lines, and when one remembers that since the close of the war there have been 20,000 Spanish immigrants to the island it becomes apparent how important is this work to its future welfare and development.

The Palma household is made bright and interesting by the six children, to which the Spanish-appearing mamma, Senora Palma, is much devoted. Five of these children have been born at the home at Central Valley and have grown up as little Americans, attending the village school and imbibing the spirit of American liberty and independence which they will carry into their new island home, and there exert an influence which will be most helpful. The oldest son, Jose, is a student at Columbia university. The Palmas are known beyond the limits of their Central Valley home for their charities, having frequently taken friendless children into their family and brought them up as their own. So Cuba not only has a chief executive to whom it can safely intrust the affairs of the government, but it has a man of domestic tastes who will take to Cuba a family that by precept and example will purify and strengthen the home life of the little nation, and which, as is so clearly seen and realized in the United States, is the bulwark and hope of any nation.

WILLIS S. EDSON.