

The fragrant weed : dedicated to its lovers / by Chispa.

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THE
FRAGRANT WEED

DEDICATED TO ITS LOVERS

BY
CHISPA

“He let’s me have good tobacco, and he does not
Sophisticate it with sack, lees, or oil;
Nor washes it in muscadel and grains,
Nor buries it in gravel underground!”

BEN JONSON’S *Abel Drugger*.

LIVERPOOL:
PUBLISHED BY J. T. SPARKE & CO.,
B 4, EXCHANGE BUILDINGS.

1877.

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W. B. RAY



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THE FRAGRANT WEED.

“I'll teach thee (do observe me here),
To take tobacco like a cavalier;
Thus, draw the vapour through your nose, and say,
'Puffe! it is gone!' fuming the smoke away.”

THUS wrote the old dramatist, Rowland, in his comedy, “A Pair of Shy Knaves,” published in 1610, the speaker into whose mouth the lines were placed being a London sharper who undertook to teach a country bumpkin the proper and fashionable method of smoking. This little incident serves to show how general the practice of smoking had already become, though it would, indeed, to pile up evidence on the same subject, be more than sufficient to fill these pages. Rare Ben Jonson, whose pages are absolutely redolent of tobacco from one end of his plays to the other, and who used to smoke *sans intermission* at the Devil Tavern next to Temple Bar, in Fleet Street, where he established the famous Apollo Club, describes Lagliardo, in “Every Man Out of His Humour,” as so enamoured of the name of a gentleman, and so anxious to earn it, that he even “comes up every term to learn to take tobacco.” It is clear, therefore, that in a very few years after Sir Walter Raleigh had brought back the tobacco plant from Virginia to England (he only returned in 1586), and, in spite of the objurgations and “Counterblaste” of James I., the silliest, most pedantic, and, in every sense of the word, worst monarch that ever disgraced a throne, every English gentleman considered it *de rigueur* to increase the number of consumers of the Indian weed.

No stronger proof of the truly beneficent qualities of tobacco could be furnished than this rapid extension of its use over the known world, coupled with the fact that wherever it has once obtained a footing, the consumption has never known even a temporary falling off. Several attempts have been made to deprive that great, good, and gallant Englishman, Sir Walter Raleigh, of the honour and glory of having been the first to

introduce tobacco into Europe; but it is satisfactory to be able to assert *confidently* that these have all failed, utterly and lamentably, and that Raleigh's fame is now firmly established as the beneficent donor to civilized humanity of the greatest luxury and one of the greatest necessities of modern life, the tobacco plant and the potato plant. One of the first assaults on Sir Walter's claim was raised by certain travellers to the east in the seventeenth century, who, finding that tobacco was largely cultivated and universally smoked by the Turks and other Orientals, jumped hastily to the conclusion that they had been acquainted with the use of the herb from time immemorial, altogether forgetting that if they had been, their knowledge would have spread westward by means either of the Crusaders, or, at a later date, through the Italian merchants who carried on constant intercourse and large trade between the East and the commercial republics of Genoa, Venice, &c. It is now, however, certain that tobacco was carried to Turkey by English seamen and merchants, and was eagerly adopted by the Orientals as a luxurious and delightful substitute for their enervating practice of inhaling the fumes of opium and hachisch. The existence of "pipes," again, of various ages and countries, has no necessary connection with tobacco, as many nations had been in the habit of smoking all kinds of nastinesses besides the extract of the white poppy long before they had heard of tobacco. Thus the ancient Romans smoked stramonium, the French devoted themselves to camphor, and even the English, for medicinal purposes only, used to smoke camomiles and other flowers and herbs. We, however, never took to smoking as a national habit until a countryman discovered for us the proper herb to smoke.

Another rival has been set up to Raleigh in the person of Ralph Lane, and even Camden, the author of the "Annals of Queen Elizabeth," and many other contemporaneous historical works, say that "Lane has the honour of being the original English smoker." But Lane, it must be remembered, was only one of Sir Walter's subordinate officers, a trusted one, indeed, and raised by his chief to the rank of Governor of Virginia; but to take away the honour of discovery from the captain to award it to the lieutenant would be like attributing the victory of Trafalgar to Collingwood because the death of Nelson enabled the second in command to send the news to England; so, while giving all honour to Lane for the gallant and loyal services he rendered to his chief, we can only assign him a

second place. A more excusable though worse founded attempt has been patriotically put forward by Spaniards and Genoese to give to Christopher Columbus the merit of the discovery and introduction. But here we have at once a more than sufficient answer. More than three quarters of a century elapsed between the death of Columbus and the date attributed to Raleigh's importation, and yet, in all those years, years be it remembered of marvellous literary activity, in no English, Spanish, Italian



SIR WALTER RALEIGH.

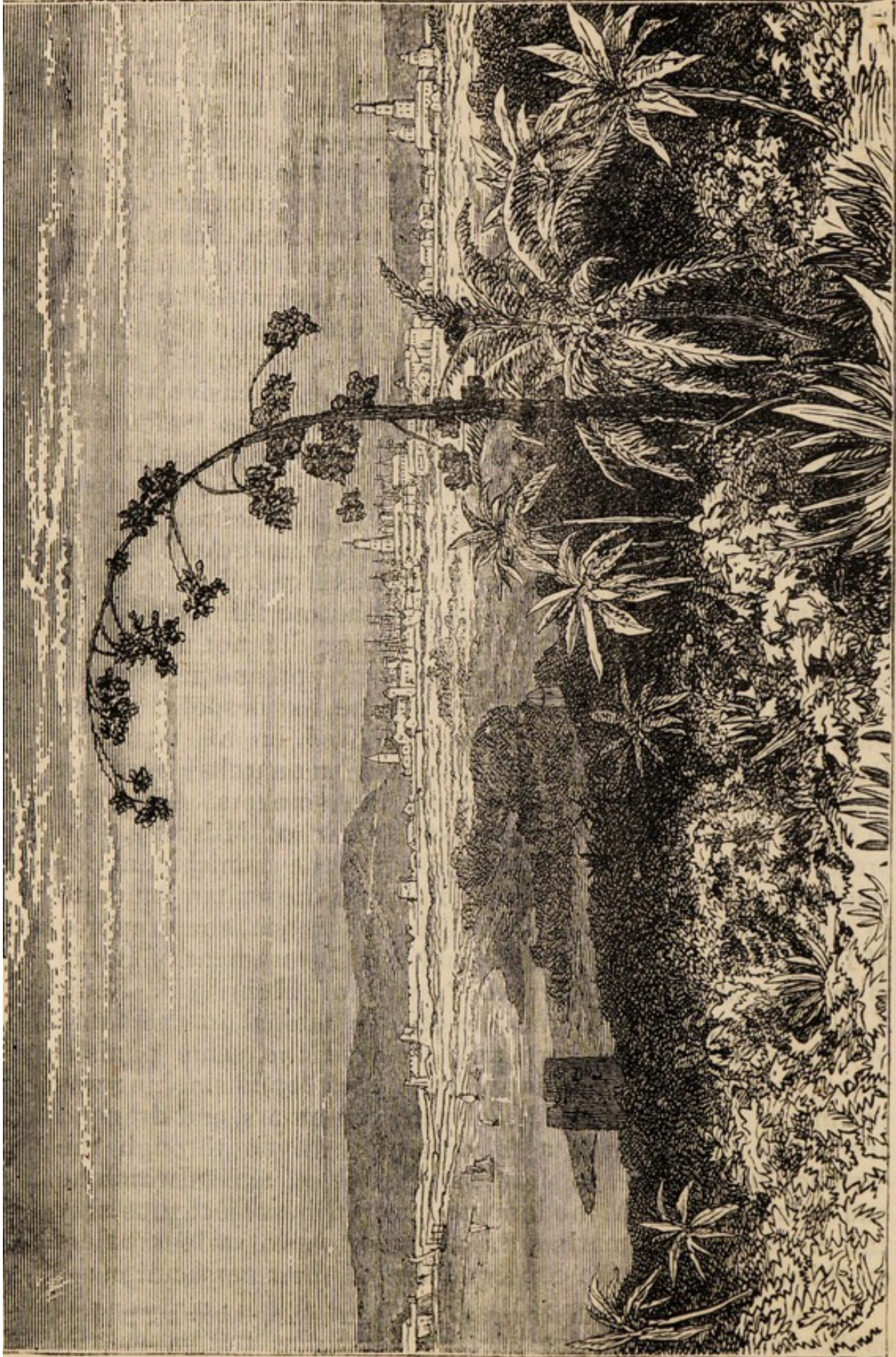
or any other writer can there be found even the most distant allusion to the use of tobacco. Yet let it be added that most undoubtedly the Genoese discoverer had the opportunity of adding to his other illustrious discoveries that of tobacco, only he neglected to avail himself of the chance, for in the account of his voyages we read how two of his officers, sent ashore to

explore the island of Cuba, returned to their ships in a terrible fright to report that they had encountered natives "with firebrands in their mouths, and great rolls of dense smoke spurting from their mouths and nostrils!" It need not be said that these aborigines were smoking genuine Havana cigars, not certainly the delicately manufactured weeds of the nineteenth century, but an immense affair more than a foot long and shaped something like a cornucopia, the outer skin of which, according to Lobel the botanist, was a palm leaf, the inner portion, however, consisting solely of tobacco. From these Columbian "firebrands" we have reached, by imperceptible gradations, the Havana cigar of our own day, so that we are thus naturally brought to the conclusion of the first portion of our introductory remarks.

Having thus seen "*Nicotiana Tabacum*" fairly launched by Sir Walter Raleigh on its all conquering career, we have next to trace its commercial and social history. First, however, let us mention that the word tobacco is in itself a misnomer, meaning originally the pipes in which the Caribbean aborigines smoked the nicotian weed, and from which, indeed, the Island of Tobago derives its name. But this is a mere parenthesis of little importance. Between 1586 and 1603, the year in which Queen Elizabeth died and James VI. of Scotland ascended the throne, the use of tobacco spread without opposition. The virgin queen, although she never indulged in the weed herself, was far too proud of her Raleighs and Drakes and the rest of her gallant circumnavigators, to place any check on the habits and tastes they had picked up on the Spanish main, so that the odour of tobacco became familiar enough in the town of London and at the Royal palaces of Greenwich, Hampton, and Windsor. But her successor was of very different mettle. He dreaded the sight of a naked sword, he hated a brave man, and he shuddered and turned sick when he smelt tobacco. Consequently, when he came south, and discovered that every brave man smoked, his wrath exceeded all bounds; and, impressed with the notion that he had some skill as a writer and a scholar, he injudiciously destroyed what little reputation for sense or wisdom might have clung to his memory by joining the list of Royal authors and rushing into print with his notorious "*Counterblaste*" in the very year he ascended the English throne. It was this work that gained for the poor weakling the title from the English wits and humourists of the Scottish Solomon, which he accepted quite seriously, and

without the slightest idea that it had been bestowed on him in derision and jest. An amusing anecdote will illustrate the ignorance of the writings of this Royal author in our own days. When Mr. Andrew Halliday produced at Drury Lane Theatre his play of the "King O' Scots," founded on Sir Walter Scott's "Fortunes of Nigel," he put into the mouth of Mr. Phelps, who played James I., a very appropriate quotation from the "Counterblaste," which to modern ears sounded so outrageous, that several learned critics alluded to the speech in question as an amusing but exaggerated burlesque of the King's style! Consequently, it may not be uninteresting to quote one or two of the milder passages of the work; the stronger ones would be altogether too offensive to ears polite. In one place he denounces smoking as "a custom loathsome to the eye, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs, and in the black, stinking fume thereof, nearest resembling the horrible Stygian smoke of the pit that is bottomless." Again, "Tobacco is the lively image and pattern of hell;" and in another passage, "It is like hell in the very substance of it, for it is a stinking loathsome thing, and so is hell." It must be admitted that the King did not mince his language, and while he found flatterers to applaud his comminations, other rulers who dared to be as despotic as he wanted to be, imitated and even improved on his example. Pagan, Mahomedan, and Christian monarchs both in Europe and Asia combined to crush the smokers. The first to follow James was the semi-savage Czar of Muscovy, who prescribed amputation of the nose as the punishment for smoking; but close in his wake followed the Sultan Amurath IV., the Pope Urban VIII., the King of Persia, the Emperor of Delhi (Jehan Geer), the Republican Government of Berne in Switzerland, and, after the death of Henri IV., Louis XIII. of France. In Berne the offence ranked in the table of crimes next to adultery, and received the same punishment; while, in Constantinople, the Turk found smoking was summarily seized, mounted backwards on an ass, and dragged about the streets with a tobacco-pipe driven through the cartilage of his nose, to show the terrible offence of which he had been guilty. A modern writer on this subject thus ably and eloquently summarises the action of these various rulers on this subject and the consequences of their persecution:—

"Arming themselves with scourges, halters, knives, and bearing gibbets on their banners, they announced death to all found inhaling the fumes of the plant through a tube, or caught with a pellet of it under their tongues.



HAVANA.

Such as used it as a sternutative only were dealt with more gently—they were merely to be deprived of their organs of smelling, of nostrils and nose. To perfect the miseries of the pitiable delinquents, Urban VIII. went in awful pomp to the Vatican, where, tremulous with holy anger, he shook his garments to intimate that the blood of the offenders would be on their own heads, and then thundered excommunication on every soul who took the accursed thing, in any shape, into a church. Was ever destruction of body and spirit threatened so unjustly? Mutilation for taking a pinch! Loss of life for lighting a pipe! Exclusion from heaven for, perhaps, harmlessly reviving attention to a wearisome sermon in chapel or church! Merciful heavens! What comminations these to emanate from Christian kings and Christ's successor! Present and eternal death, tortures here and endless torments hereafter, for a whiff or a quid of tobacco! Our sympathies are naturally excited for the sufferers. One wonders how they managed to preserve their integrity, or pass through the fires unscathed, or even escape annihilation. Yet most of them escaped, and they did more—they converted the Nebuchadnezzars who sought to consume them. Conscious of their innocence, and of their rights, they mildly persisted in maintaining them. Of retiring habits, they avoided agitation and debate, declaring that the properties of the proscribed herb made such efforts uncongenial, while it strengthened them in passive resistance, composed their spirits, and rendered them in a great measure indifferent to abuse, and often insensible to pain. Hence they smoked, and chewed, and sneezed at home until their hottest enemies became their warmest friends, and even greater sinners than they themselves had been."

But in spite of all that Pope or Pagan, King or Kaiser,* could do, the use of tobacco spread with marvellous rapidity

* On these wholesale denunciations of tobacco the *Civil Service Gazette*, in a recent issue, very sensibly observes:—King James and Dr. Lee have alike inveighed vainly against the use of tobacco, but the majority of Englishmen, at all events, have declared in favour of the soothing cigar. Far more likely indeed, to be deterrent in their effects on the annual consumption of cigars than all the arguments of the Anti-British Tobacco Society are the artificial prices which the exigencies of the trade, and the greed of too many retail tobacconists have placed on the choicest and most fashionable brands. A little inquiry behind the scenes, discloses the truth that the profits of middlemen are really most responsible for these extravagant charges. Any smoker who has been in the habit of buying really good cigars from metropolitan retailers would be astounded on reading the price-list of those extensive importers, Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of Liverpool, whose business is mainly confined to the large clubs, to some very large purchasers among the nobility and gentry, and the great Lancashire manufacturers. In the list before us, the very finest brands are quoted at prices which bring them within the reach of all classes, and would startle most people accustomed to London prices. This is just one of the cases in which the shopkeepers may well be dispensed with, for every habitual smoker can buy a hundred cigars, and by purchasing them of the importer, he will effect a saving of very nearly one-half—and in some cases more—whether his fancy be for Partaga's, for Intimidad's, for Cabana's, for Villar's, for Guacho's, for Morale's, Cabarga's, or for any of the best brands.

over the known world. In spite even of prohibiting customs duties, men would not give up the weed. Under Elizabeth, the duty on tobacco was only twopence per pound; James immediately raised it to six shillings and tenpence, equal to about forty-five shillings of our money, and, in consequence, it was sold at something like three shillings an ounce. In consequence of this enormous import duty many people endeavoured to grow tobacco for themselves, and were, to a certain extent, successful, when down he came again and suppressed the sale altogether, *except as a Royal monopoly!* And here history records, that when he found the monopoly poured great wealth into the Royal purse, the King, whose avarice was almost on a par with his meanness, ceased to denounce the previously unpardonable sins of smoking and snuffing. How great the revenue derived from tobacco must have been, even at that early period, may be gathered from the statistics published by Rich in his "Honestie of this Age," according to which there were, in 1614, upwards of 7,000 houses living by the trade of tobacco selling, and our author continues "it may well be supposed to be but an ill-accustomed shop that taketh not five shillings a day, one with another, throughout the whole yeare, or if one do take less, two other may take more; but let us make our account at two shillings and sixpence a day, for he that taketh less than that would be ill able to pay his rent, or to keepe open his shop windows, neither would tobacco houses make such a muster as they do, and that almost in every lane and in every by-corner round about London. Let us, then, reckon thus—7,000 half-crowns a day amounteth just to £319,375 a yeare—*summa totalis* all spent in smoake!" Considering that the population of London in 1614 could not have amounted to more than one fifteenth of its present number, the most enthusiastic smokers must be content with the progress the weed had made in the short space of thirty years. Since the days of James I., we have had smokers and non-smokers on the throne, but, with the exception of our present Queen, not one sovereign who has not made use of tobacco in some form or another. The two Charles's and the second James all snuffed, as did Queens Mary II. and Anne, while Cromwell and William of Orange smoked consumedly. All the Georges and all their Queens either smoked or snuffed, and William IV. did both, and chewed into the bargain. To come down to the immediate present, the Heir-Apparent and his brothers, the Dukes of Edinburgh

and Connaught, are determined smokers, the Prince of Wales especially being quite catholic in his tastes, and applying himself by turns to cigar, to pipe, or to cigarette. What little effect the "Counterblaste" ever had, if ever it had any, has entirely died away, and, from the shadow of the throne to the outer doors of a casual ward, tobacco is everywhere. Not that it has ever been without its opponents. From worthy Edmund Gardiner, who told us that the patrimony of many noble young gentlemen had vanished in smoke, and that "tobacco is a fantastical attractor and glutton feeder of the appetite;" down to Drs. Carpenter and Richardson and their colleagues of the Anti-Tobacco Society, who have discovered that smoking is the cause of many strange diseases, which, fortunately for themselves, the smokers are quite ignorant of ever having suffered from, there have always been writers and orators to denounce the "baneful weed." On the other hand, a general consensus of opinion has been on the other side. Our greatest poets, painters, philosophers, preachers, physicians, surgeons, men of science, novelists, actors,* all have been

* The *Railway Times*, which must, at all events, be allowed to know something about engineers, goes so far as to say that, "It would be difficult to name a really great man among all who have flourished during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries who has not been a confirmed and habitual smoker. From Sir Walter Raleigh, to Thomas Carlyle, every great thinker has found the operations of his brain facilitated and fertilised by the fragrant cigar or the soothing pipe. Doctors and divines, authors and artists, statesmen, soldiers and sailors, mechanics and mathematicians, artisans and engineers, princes and peasants, have all acknowledged and bowed before the beneficent sway of tobacco. But this universal allegiance has one disadvantage. It unfortunately happens that only a very restricted portion of the earth's surface produces the particular tobacco of which is manufactured the finest cigars, and the enormous demand has naturally made a really good cigar a somewhat expensive luxury. And this natural dearness has been artificially heightened by the heavy expenses and long credits which are the bane of our West-end retailers, until it is no exaggeration to say that many inveterate cigar smokers puff away the income of a first-class mechanic or a couple of curates. And certainly it would be unwise to advise these to buy inferior cigars. Of all abominations in this world, nothing is worse than a bad cigar. But it is possible to effect a very material saving by paying cash and dealing directly with the importer. Certainly it is then necessary to buy by the box, and a firm of importers, Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., come to the assistance of the connoisseur, and offer considerable facilities to buyers by forwarding sample bundles of half-a-dozen, on receipt of stamps, at practically the same prices as by the box, in order that intending purchasers may decide on the brand and size best suited to their individual tastes. Messrs. Sparke, who supply many of the nobility, gentry, merchants, and leading clubs of the County Palatine, are large importers of all the finest Havana brands, and certainly their prices will astonish all who have been accustomed only to retail charges."

great smokers. A hundred pamphlets like this might easily be filled with the tributes the most famous writers have offered to tobacco, but as there is not here the space for quotation, let the reader recall for himself the almost sublime description of King Frederic's tobacco parliament, drawn for us by that indefatigable smoker, the philosopher of Chelsea, THOMAS CARLYLE.

Yet have smokers had other troubles more important than the inane arguments of those who know nothing of the soothing effects of a good cigar. Hardly had tobacco become popular in England, before the practice of adulterating it also began.* Even at the date already quoted, 1614, according to Dr. Barclay, of Edinburgh, "black spice, galanga, aqua vitæ, Spanish wine, anise seeds, oyle of spicke," and such like, were used for adulterating tobacco, while other practices may be inferred by implication from those which Ben Jonson tells us Abel Drugger, that best of tobacconists, did not resort to. And, alas! some of the dealers of the nineteenth century are even less unscrupulous than those of the seventeenth. Only the other day Mr. H. W. Prescott, of the Inland Revenue Department, and a great authority on the subject, gave a terrible list of the horrible materials of which inferior British, and nearly all continental, cigars are manufactured. Among these were "rhubarb leaves, sugar, alum, dock leaves, lime, saltpetre, burdock leaves, fuller's earth, chromate of lead, colt's foot, beech, oak, elm, plaintain, peat-moss, salt, lamp-black, bran, tan-dust, rootlets of malt, barley meal, oatmeal, pea-meal, potatoes, cabbage, iron-

* In an article on "Havannah Cigars," the *Civilian* writes:—"If we were to enter at length upon the evil results of the use of bad cigars, we fear the space at our command would fail us; but, as to the thorough enjoyment obtainable from a cigar of the best brand, there cannot be two opinions, and it would be useless to quote authorities to prove that such is the case. A really first-class cigar is, however, an expensive luxury, especially if procured from the ordinary retailer, whose profits are enormous. To prevent what seems to be an excessive tax upon the consumer, and yet to give him all that can be desired, it is satisfactory to observe that such a well-known firm as Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., Liverpool, come to the front and undertake to supply single boxes containing 100 of the choicest cigars at prices which, compared with those of the retailers, are certainly from thirty to forty per cent. less. Messrs. Sparke have long been extensive importers of the best qualities of cigars only, and in such estimation are their brands held that several of the London clubs, and many officers' messes, are supplied by them exclusively, so that their new enterprise well deserves success."

filings, and dyes of various kinds."* In certain continental cities, such as Hamburgh, Rotterdam, and Strasburgh, enormous quantities of cigars are manufactured in which it is altogether the exception to find the slightest trace of a tobacco leaf, though some of the makers do oblige their customers with a suspicion of genuine flavour by soaking their cabbage leaves in very hot and strong tobacco water, but these are only the very honest and scrupulous ones who are troubled with a conscience. These disgusting compounds are sold in this country as "real *foreign* cigars," and so indeed they are, in the sense of not being English, but to nine purchasers out of ten, nay, to ninety-nine out of a hundred, the word "foreign" in connection with cigars is supposed to be synonymous with "Havana," and it is worth mentioning that the vile trash described has to pay the same duty on entering this country as the choicest and most costly Havana cigars, so that it is evident that the poor consumer is not only injured in his stomach but is robbed in pocket. Let it be said that in very many instances the retailer of these cigars is just as ignorant as the purchaser. A brilliant essayist and journalist once wrote that every man believed he could drive a four-in-hand, make a salad, or edit a newspaper—until he tried. To these universal gifts, it may surely be added that every man also believes he can manage a tavern and a tobacconist's shop, though both are difficult above the average of trades, and the latter requires the education of a lifetime. What, for instance, is more common than to see an advertisement in the *Daily Telegraph*, in the *Times*, or some leading provincial newspaper, to this

* All sporting men are known to be determined smokers, so it is natural enough that so distinguished an authority as the *Sportsman* should have noticed this Report, anent which it remarks that:—"Among the greatest enemies to public health are foul, rank noxious tobacco, and, worse still, the adulterated abominations sold as cigars, which, according to official statements, are composed of 'sugar, alum, lime, meal, rhubarb leaves, salpêtre, fuller's earth, chromate of lead, peat, moss, common burdock leaves, salt, lamp black, and dyes,' and are occasionally steeped in strong tobacco water to give them a flavour. The question then arises, 'How is one to be sure of getting a good cigar?' and the answer is simple, 'Buy of the importer.' Go to a respectable firm of good standing, such as Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of B 4, Exchange Buildings, Liverpool; examine their price-list, select your favourite brand, and while you may be quite assured of getting what you order, you will also have the gratification of obtaining your box of first-class cigars at about half the price for which a long-credit-giving and expense-laden retailer could afford to supply you."

effect:—"CIGAR STORES (old established) for disposal. Trade £1,500 yearly. Large profits. Easily managed. No previous knowledge required. Sure fortune for a business man. Would suit a gentleman's servant. Price for stock, fixtures, goodwill, &c. ———. Apply, &c." The "no previous knowledge required" is the great inducement. The bait seldom fails, and some poor fellow who has saved up a few hundred pounds, possibly by an average lifetime of servitude, parts with his little capital and finds himself the proud possessor of an attractive-looking shop with, as he thinks, a valuable stock of cigars. He knows nothing about the matter, but he takes the inscriptions on his boxes for solemn and undoubted truths, and he goes on selling his Villars, his Partagas, his Intimidads and his Henry Clays out of his Whitechapel or Hamburgh manufactured stock, in pure innocence and honesty of heart.* Then, too, it is almost a certainty that before he has been many days in business he will receive a visit from a be-jewelled and be-ringed foreigner who speaks broken English with an accent which is a curious compound of the Dutch and the Hebraic, or

* Agreeing with these remarks the *Westminster Gazette* writes:—"Glibly off the tongue of the smoker runs the names of the most celebrated planters of Havannah, and yet how small a minority of smokers, how few, even among ordinary retailers, know anything of the peculiarities of the different growths, or even whether they are buying or selling the brands they name. It is, indeed, almost impossible for any ordinary retail tobacconist to keep a stock of all the numerous varieties of Havannah cigars, but he must serve all comers, so Partagas and Intimidad, Cabana, El Gaucho, Henry Clay, Upmann, Paz de China, Confederacion, and Larangas, and in short all the letters of the alphabet from Arango to Zumalacarregui are supplied from the same box. This would probably not matter as much if the prices were equally uniform, but it is rather hard to pay the price of a Partagas "Reina Victoria" for a "Caliope," which is worth just a quarter the money. Possibly, the only way to avoid this annoyance is by dealing directly with the large importer who has all the brands in stock, charges his regular profits on all, and has no more interest in selling one than another. Thus the price list of Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, contains quotations of many scores of Havannah cigars, of any of which the private purchaser can obtain a single box at first price, and certainly many old smokers who see such a document for the first time will be surprised to find how the prices of real Havannah cigars, and even of the different varieties from the same plantations vary. Messrs. Sparke and Co., are well known in Lancashire, and as they carry on their large trade without any of the inevitable but heavy expenses of the fashionable London tradesman, it can be easily understood that they are enabled to give the consumer a very great advantage in price. Indeed, there are few articles of trade in which it is more beneficial to dispense with the middleman than cigars."

it may be from a truculent-looking fellow in semi-nautical costume. In either case the object of the visit is the same. The stranger has either just received, or just brought, from Havana a magnificent parcel of the very finest cigars which must be turned into money at once, at any sacrifice, under very peculiar circumstances. The poor novice sees a chance of doing business and falls into the trap, parting perhaps with fifty or sixty pounds for a lot of trash that will serve only to drive custom from his shop. He will probably have been recommended to, or have found for himself, a respectable tobacco merchant, and, finding ere long that, though he sells a considerable quantity of Virginia, Birdseye, and Returns, on which there is very little profit, he has no demand for his "choice" cigars, for which no one seems to come the second time, he applies to his tobacconist for explanation and advice. An examination of his stock ensues, and then comes an *éclaircissement* from which he learns most decidedly that some previous knowledge was required! Probably the poor fellow is ruined; possibly he may have some capital remaining, and by placing himself blindly in the hands of a respectable wholesale firm may retrieve his position. The case described is no fancy picture. It is of everyday occurrence. If, then, the retail dealers are themselves liable to be deceived and swindled in this manner, how can their equally inexperienced customer hope to escape? The answer is simple. By doing at first what it has just been shown the ignorant but honest retailer has to do at last, going directly, that is, to the importer.* For it must be remembered that

* Thus the *Irish Sportsman* asks the question, "Where to buy cigars?" and answers it as follows:—"The recent war in a department of commerce between the wholesale houses and the retailers is not without its important lesson to the public at large, as showing how the intervention of a series of middlemen increases the price of goods to a consumer. Consequently, while admitting freely that the 'distributor' or shopkeeper plays an important part in the social fabric, and in some callings is not to be dispensed with, it may be safely argued that in many cases he is but an artificial barrier between producer, manufacturer, or importer, and the final consumer, the only effect of whose existence is to raise prices to an artificial point. Thus, let any of our readers, who are familiar with the tariffs of fashionable tobacconists, compare them with the price list of a Liverpool importer, and certainly their astonishment at the difference will be unbounded. Take as a high-class representative house that of J. T. Sparke and Co., B 4, Exchange Buildings, and Havana cigars of the finest and choicest growths will be found quoted at prices which will certainly astonish the connoisseur. It is not too much to say that the average saving effected by purchasing directly of the importer would be at least fifty per cent. Thus, for the famous Partagas 'Reg. de

the ordinary purchaser, even should he escape a trader of the class pictured, is by no means sure of good treatment. There are retailers who are neither ignorant nor honest, and who are ready to take full advantage of the customer's lack of knowledge. Going a step higher, he may come to a shopkeeper who keeps one or two fine brands of Havana cigars, all his business will allow him to keep in stock at a time, out of which he meets demands for every possible brand that can be asked for, and generally to his own advantage, for it may be taken for granted that the cigar intended for all comers is not extravagantly expensive, while the seller cannot charge less than the ordinary fair retail price for the most costly cigar he is pretending to sell, so that ninepence or a shilling may frequently be paid for a cigar honestly worth fivepence or sixpence. But let our imaginary "Cœlebs in search of cigars" escape all these dangers and light on one of those rare, yet still existing, establishments where he will be served without hesitation with whatever he asks for in the shape of a cigar, and where he may be quite certain that what he pays for he gets. Even here his disadvantage, supposing he is prepared to pay ready money, is very great. He is in a shop, the proprietor of which has to keep up an immense stock, to retain cigars in his warehouses for years, and, moreover, has to give long credits, make bad debts, and meet very heavy trade expenses, for all of which luxuries the poor purchaser must pay.*

la Reina' brand, 48s. per hundred is the price asked, instead of the by no means unusual five pounds. Villar y Villar's 'Reyna Fina,' Flor Fina, is undoubtedly the finest tobacco of light quality imported, and the favourite brand of the Prince of Wales. Although every cigar is made from picked leaf, and they are only obtainable with great difficulty in any quantity, they are but 57s. the hundred. More remarkable still, is the price of 43s. for one hundred cigars bearing the 'Regalia Reina Fina—Flor Fina brand' of the famous Cautiva growth—a plant which is probably not excelled by any in the island, and so throughout the long list, including all the best planters in Havana. It must be remembered that Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co. do not sell less than one hundred cigars, though intending purchasers will be supplied with samples, in order that they may judge exactly what brand they prefer. We should like to see the system of Messrs. Sparke applied to the sister isle."

* The well-known ecclesiastical organ the *Church Review*, doubtless having a fellow-feeling for the many by no means wealthy clergymen who enjoy a smoke, but can ill afford to pay fancy prices, reminds its readers that: "While the fashionable tobacconist at the West-end of London has to keep in stock, frequently for years, every possible kind of cigar, cigarette, and tobacco, and to pay ruinous amounts for house rent and



TOBACCO PLANT.

(*Nicotiana Tabacum.*)

Come now to another point. To very many smokers, who can at least distinguish between a good cigar and a bad one, and who would never be imposed on by Dutch, German, or even English abominations, the word "Havana" is not merely genuine, but individual. If a cigar is a Havana cigar there is an end; beyond this they profess to know nothing; yet it cannot be too strongly insisted on that, although the best cigars in the world come from Havana, all the exportations from that port are by no means of good quality. Many hundreds of different kinds of cigars are made in the island, and some of these are bad enough for anything, while even the best brands have their various qualities, which vary widely in price.* No ordinary retail price list can set forth all those

trade expenses, the importer turns his money more quickly and at small expense, and is consequently enabled to sell at a price which, to his retail rival, would be simply ruin. Persons who require long credits, and any amount of accommodation, may think it worth while to pay largely for them, but the smoker who is prepared to buy his cigars for cash would do well to obtain the price-list of one of the houses alluded to, as he would there see that he could save at least fifty per cent. on his ordinary expenditure. Messrs. J. T. Sparke, and Co., of Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, quote the famous Villar y Villar at only 35s. 6d. for the Rey de la Reina, Flor Fina, and 57s. for the Reyna Fina, this last being the favourite cigar of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, and undoubtedly made of the very finest tobacco, of light quality, exported from Havannah. As of these two examples so of the rest; and although Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co. do not sell less than one hundred cigars, it should be borne in mind that intending purchasers can always obtain samples at the current price by forwarding stamps, and can thus learn by experience what they are to obtain for their money.

* The *Anglo-American Times*, a paper devoted to the interests and guidance of visitors from the United States to this country, waxes quite eloquent on this subject, remarking that: "Co-operative stores, objectionable as are many of their features, have at all events familiarised the public with the advantages to be obtained by cash dealings, and by dispensing, where practicable, with the intervention of a middleman, which of course means an extra profit. In nothing are these two trade axioms more valuable than in the case of cigars. The fashionable London tobacconist has himself to buy of the importer, he has to give very long credit, he makes many bad debts, pays a heavy rental, and has enormous trade expenses. Consequently, his prices must be proportionately high to enable him to live; and cigars, like wines, are not so easily judged that every purchaser can tell whether he is receiving value for money, or whether indeed he is getting at all what he is paying for. Therefore it is advantageous in many ways to go direct to the importer. We have before us the price-list of that Northern firm, Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of B 4, Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, in which every size of every famous Havannah brand is quoted, and all of them at prices from thirty to fifty per cent. below the ordinary retailer, and at these

varieties in detail, though the importer does it as a matter of course. Every brand and every quality of that brand comes to him in the ordinary way of business. He sets for himself the same rate of profit on all kinds, and thus his price-current goes out to the trade, and indeed to the world at large, drawn on fixed principles, and calculated for the ordinary trade credit, so that to the ready-money purchaser there is a discount off even these prices.*

Let the reader suppose that by this time we have proceeded so far on our way in the search for a good cigar that we have discovered a firm of importers of unimpeachable character and long-established reputation, and that we have obtained a price list from which to select our especial weed. One who sees such a document for the first time is likely to experience a

prices any purchaser can obtain a single box. He can even, before fixing on his particular brand, enclose stamps to a corresponding amount, for a sample of half-a-dozen cigars of different kinds. By the way, the smoker will learn from this list a fact which to many will be both new and astonishing. Hitherto he has been familiar with the names of Partagas, Intimidads, Cabanas Villar y Villar, Caliopes, Morales, and other esteemed brands; but he will now learn that of each of these there are several varieties, the value depending on the 'sub-title,' so to speak. Thus, Villar's cigars are quoted at 30s. for Principes, and 35s. 6d. for 'Reg. de la Reina' both of which are very good cigars; but the 'Reyna Fina,' which in the opinion of the best judges are the very finest cigars of light quality imported, and are, it may be added, the favourite smokes of the Prince of Wales, are 57s.; and how is an ordinary customer, asking for a dozen cigars from an ordinary retailer, who probably knows little more of the matter, to judge whether he gets 'Reg. de la Reina' or 'Reyna Fina.' Therefore buy of the importer, and pay cash."

* The *Courier* tells us that: "A good cigar is a luxury thoroughly appreciated by those who know how to enjoy it, but it does not always follow that when a high price is paid for that which is warranted to be the best tobacco the purchaser obtains what he has paid for. This arises from the enormous profits made by retailers or 'middlemen,' especially those who make a fashion of giving long credit, and to such an extent is this system carried out, that it is beginning to work its own remedy. Thus lovers of the 'weed' are now afforded an opportunity of obtaining the best brands of cigars at moderate cost from the importers, who undertake to supply single boxes at reduced rates. Conspicuous among these houses is that of Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of B 4, Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, who are importers of only the finest growths of tobacco, and whose boxes of cigars, containing a hundred are supplied upon the most moderate terms. Looking through their price-list, and comparing the figures and the brands with those of the chief retailers, the reduction is equal to thirty or forty per cent. As a proof of the high estimation in which the cigars supplied by Messrs. Sparke and Co., are held, it may be mentioned that they supply them to several of the London clubs, numerous officers' messes, &c."

feeling akin to that *embarras des richesses* of which the Gallic Croesus so bitterly complained. Here are some sixty or seventy varieties from which to choose, yet all are high class Havana cigars, having certain qualities in common, yet each having especial characteristics of its own. Looking more closely into particulars, the reader, if he has been accustomed to purchase fashionable brands from a West-end tradesman, is likely, in the next place, to be even more astonished at the prices submitted to his perusal than at the variety.* To explain these two remarkable features of such a list satisfactorily, it is necessary to make a few remarks on the cigar plantations and manufactories of the Havana.

The island of Cuba, of which, it should be remembered, Havana is merely the chief city and port, is by far the largest

* Very pertinent to this branch of the subject are the following remarks from the *London Daily Recorder*, "After the bad crops of recent times, it is gratifying to learn, by the latest accounts from Havannah, that things look more promising than they have done for some years. Except, however, for those who prefer cigars green rather than matured, it will be some time before any material advantage is reaped by the general smoker through the goodness of this year's harvest, and it may therefore be taken for granted that the fashionable tobacconists will maintain their present 'famine prices.' It may well be asked, however, whether these prices, like those of the London butchers, are not somewhat artificial, and an inquiring mind might be long before finding a satisfactory reason for the difference in the cost of a cigar to-day and a very few years ago. And, certainly, a consumer who had been paying eighteenpence or two shillings for cigars of moderately good quality would not find his satisfaction greatly increased, except for the future, by perusing the price list of a large importer. Thus, quoting from the list of that eminent house—J. T. Sparke and Co., of B 4, Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, we find that, among the choicest and most fashionable brands the prices for 'Reg. de la Reina Flor Fina,' usually the best quality kept by a retail house are Parugas 43s., Intimidads 35s., Villar y Villar 35s. 6d., Caliope 28s. 6d., Henry Clays 33s., Elecciones 41s., Coutivas 43s., and Flor de Cuba 45s. per hundred. From all or nearly all these plantations Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., give lower quotations, and in some cases higher, which are for specially selected cigars of extraordinary quality, but these also are, when compared with retail prices equally remarkable, thus Villar's 'Reyna Fina F. F.,' the favourite cigar of the Prince of Wales, and, in the opinion of the best judges, the very finest tobacco of light quality imported, is marked at 57s. All these prices appear to be framed to meet large purchases and for cash, but we believe that any private purchaser may obtain a single hundred at the same rates, with, of course an absolute certainty of obtaining the brand he pays for, and of thus effecting a saving of at least fifty per cent. in that most dearly prized of all luxuries—a good cigar. While we are not in opposition to the Anti-Tobacco League, we are yet desirous that those who smoke the favoured weed should smoke it pure and unadulterated, and in calling attention to Messrs. J. T. Sparke's supplies are confident that none can be better."

of the West Indian or Carribean group, being seven hundred miles long, and upwards of a hundred broad. As already remarked, it was discovered by Christopher Columbus, and has ever since been held by the Spaniards, this island, with Porto Rico, being the only remains of the once enormous colonies of Spain in the Western Hemisphere, and the reader need hardly be reminded that for some years past some of the colonists have been endeavouring—though as yet without success—to throw off the yoke of the mother country. Havana is, beyond all comparison, the finest city in the West Indies, containing many handsome churches and public buildings, although the streets, like those of most Spanish cities, are ill kept. The harbour is really magnificent, and is most convenient for shipping, as, although the entrance is narrow, it is without a bar, and once inside, half the navies of Europe might ride safely at anchor without fear of overcrowding. Nature has been most bountiful in various ways to Cuba. Traversed throughout its length by chains of mountains, from these to the sea on both sides spread extensive plains or savannahs so fertile that two and even three crops of grain or other produce are yielded annually. Minerals are abundant. The native trees, fruits, vegetables, grain, the *flora* and *fauna* of the island are most varied, abundant, and valuable; but the exports are mainly confined to sugar, coffee, and, most important of all, tobacco. Indeed, it must be said that the Spaniards have done little in Cuba to supplement the bountiful gifts of Nature; and although, remembering our own breakdown in Jamaica, we must not blame others too severely, it may yet fairly be pointed out that the shameful system that was maintained for centuries of sending out a Governor-General with the avowed object of making a colossal fortune in five years, and granting him the most despotic power for this purpose, was hardly calculated either to benefit the island, or to increase the love of the colonists for their rulers. But for the planters, Cuba would now be a desert waste. These, however, with the aid of slave labour, have extended the cultivation of the soil, the high lands being devoted to coffee, the swamps to sugar, and the savannahs to tobacco.

There are in the island many hundreds of tobacco planters, but of these only some score or two can be said to have given any important market value to their names in this country, the rest from their careless system of cultivation, their primitive methods of manufacture, and their bad management

generally, contriving to raise some of the worst tobacco and to make some of the worst cigars that can be found anywhere. Fortunately the English tariff pretty well closes our markets against these goods, and they are for the most part exported to Spain and to the South American Republics.

The leaf once obtained, the system of making cigars is much the same all the world over, so that it is unnecessary to enter here into any description of the *modus operandi*. The most delicate and most important portion of the process everywhere is that of selecting, sorting, or "picking" the leaf, and this, perhaps, is carried out with greater nicety in the best Havana factories than elsewhere. When the loads of fresh leaf are brought on horse or mule back to the *hacienda*, negro girls, carefully watched by an overseer, examine every leaf minutely, and, according to its quality, place it on the heap to which it is supposed to pertain. These heaps are all kept separate, and are reserved for the different classes of cigar, which are afterwards rolled in different rooms. Being, made of the moist leaf, Havana cigars naturally require more time to mature than the European article, which is manufactured from the dried plant, but it is worth mentioning that most Cuban planters are of opinion that by over-maturing, English smokers lose much of the fragrant bouquet and choicest flavour of their cigars.

One of the first names that became familiar to Englishmen, in connection with Havana cigars, was that of Cabana, and not a few among us never realised that the word was the name of a planter, but rather supposed it was another form of "Habana." So it was, however, and to this day very many excellent judges prefer Cabana's best cigars to those of his modern rivals. On this point we must allow every smoker to judge for himself,* and decide according to his own palate.

* "While it may be freely admitted," remarks the *Naval and Military Gazette* on this point, "that many smokers can as little appreciate the delicate subtle distinctions between different brands of Havana cigars as many drinkers can distinguish between two neighbouring vintages of Bordeaux or Burgundy, it is at least certain that every one smoking a cigar quietly at home can determine whether or not it is grateful to his own palate. To the large class coming within this category, not less than the most profound connoisseur, a decided advantage is offered in the plan adopted by Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, of forwarding, at a small cost, samples, carefully selected from numerous brands of the price required, each of which is labelled with its name and price, &c. Specially useful, too, is the system to mess stewards, who may thus learn how to suit the

The name, however, offers a good opportunity of illustrating a point already alluded to, and also of contrasting the prices of a firm of importers and of a London retailer. Lying before us at this moment are the price lists of Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of Liverpool, and of a fashionable West-end tobacconist.* The manner in which the latter is drawn up renders it impossible to institute a comparison throughout, as after the manner of such houses, many of the cigars are described as "Regalia de la Reina," "Reina Flors," "Regalia de la Reina, Flor Fina," "Victorias," "Regalias," "Imperials," &c., &c., all of which are very pretty titles, doubtless, but without the addition of some distinctive appellation of planter or plantation mean absolutely nothing. Of Cabana's cigars in Sparke's list, there are no less than eight varieties, all of which are "Flor Fina," ranging in price from "Princesas" at 30s. 6d. per hundred, to "Britannica Especial" at 63s. Of these there are several to be found in both lists, as "Cabana Regalia," quoted in London at 90s. per hundred, in Liverpool at 43s.; "Cabana Regalia Chica," London price 63s., Liverpool, 55s.; "Ca-

tastes of a number of officers before laying in a large stock on chance. To large purchasers, Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co. offer exceptionally advantageous terms, although to purchasers of single boxes their prices are exceedingly moderate, ranging upwards from 26s. per 100 for the finest Havana growths. Such prices are due to the fact that no middle profit is called for, the firm in question being direct importers."

* The *United Service Gazette* points out very emphatically the difference between the importers' and the retailers' prices:—"Many Americans when they visit Europe for the first time complain loudly and bitterly of the difficulty of procuring the best Havana cigars at a fair price. The difficulty is, however, due rather to their ignorance of the right places to buy at than to any lack of 'weeds' in this country. An acquaintance with a few good firms calls to our mind Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of B 4, Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, who always have in stock an abundance not only of all the best brands of the Havana, but of the whole Cuban territory; and to enable intending purchasers to select their cigars at leisure, the firm have adopted the sensible plan of sending out samples of different brands and ages at the prices and of the quantity required, from which the smoker can tell with certainty what particular growth is most grateful to his own palate. The long experience and connections of this importing firm naturally give them exceptional opportunities for supplying the very best cigars at really moderate prices, at such as are often from forty to sixty per cent. under West-end houses for an inferior article, but their stores in Liverpool are not the palatial buildings of the Mall or Bond Street, and to this difference is due the increased price which (for the retailers' profit) the London consumer has to pay."

bana Britannica," London £ 5, Liverpool, as above-mentioned, 63s. To these may be added the "Comme il Faut," which, being exclusively a Cabana brand, may be taken from the London list, although it is there given without the profit, the price being 60s., while Messrs. Sparke's quotation is 51s. Thus it will be seen that on the cigars from one estate there is a difference between the importers' and the retailers' prices ranging from sixteen to upwards of one hundred per cent.* It must be fairly owned that for this enormous difference the tobacconist is not altogether without excuses founded on his method of conducting his business. These, however, are but small consolation to the purchasers who are willing to go with their money in their hands to buy a box of good cigars at a fair price. All such have their remedy within easy reach.† The principle of the co-opera-

* The *Sunday Times* says:—"It is matter of notoriety that for some years past it has been becoming more and more difficult to procure a really good cigar at a reasonable cost from the ordinary retailers, yet the most fastidious connoisseur who possesses the energy to dispense with the services of a middleman, might still obtain the very finest cigars of Havannah by purchasing direct from the importers, who publish their full market list of the various qualities of all the choicest brands grown in the island of Cuba, and at prices which offer only a small margin of profit, but which, it is to be presumed, are satisfactory to them, because they turn over their money quickly and in large sums. Thus an importing house like Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, see it to their advantage to quote all the most famous and most fashionable brands of Cuba at something like half the prices of some fashionable dealers, and yet from them not only can any private purchaser obtain so small a quantity as one hundred cigars at the announced prices, but even samples will be supplied to intending purchasers. There can be no doubt that the doing away with the services of the middleman materially places all articles of commerce before the public to much advantage, and this bold feature of Messrs. Sparke and Co., will doubtless merit the same support which the quality of their cigars has long maintained."

† What this remedy is the *John Bull* points out in the following extract:—"Among all classes there is a growing tendency to purchase direct from the manufacturer or importer instead of from the retailer, and that such is the case cannot excite surprise, when the advantages which must necessarily accrue to the consumer by thus buying are so palpable. Economy and the better security for the excellence or purity of the article bought, are of course the great inducements to obtain them in this manner, and that there is still a large class of persons who prefer to patronize retail shops, only proves to our minds that importers or manufacturers, as the case may be, have been slow to make arrangements by which they may be brought into direct contact with the consumers. Among the firms of eminence which have adopted a style of business to meet the requirements of direct purchasers, is that of Messrs. J. T.

tive stores is to reduce prices by doing away with middlemen, and for all articles in which deception is impossible, these places may be useful; but they deal in so many varieties of goods, that they cannot possibly have experienced supervisors for each department, and it is consequently notorious that for articles requiring judgment in selection, such as wines, teas, and cigars, the "Stores" are, if anything, dearer than the ordinary tradesman. Therefore some other course must be adopted in these cases to get rid of the middleman's profit. What this course should be for wines and teas we will leave to others to point out: for cigars the road is easy. It is necessary only, to obtain from an importer of undoubted respectability his price list, to select the brand preferred, and to send a cheque or Post Office order for a box of one hundred cigars.* A smaller quantity than a hundred, of course, cannot be obtained from these houses, as it is precisely because they avoid so many of the expenses of retail establishments, in addition to saving the intermediate profit, that they are enabled to sell at prices so far below them. After all, to a regular smoker a box of cigars is by no means a large order, and those who do not like to purchase so many without having first essayed them will find their convenience consulted. Although not undertaking generally to furnish

Sparke and Co., the cigar importers of Exchange Buildings, Liverpool. By the excellent arrangements of this firm every facility is afforded to the smoker of 'satisfying' his peculiar tastes or requirements. From a reference to their price-list, which shows at a glance the true quality of every cigar, it will be observed that the prices quoted are far below those of most retail establishments; and when we add that Messrs. Sparke and Co. have so carefully adjusted these prices as to render it immaterial to their interests whether they sell the costly cigars of Partagas, or the far less expensive brands of Manuel Marinas, it will at once be evident that the smoker must benefit by dealing with such a firm."

* *Land and Water*, writing on the subject of "commissions" pertinently remarks that: "Much as the *Times* and other contemporaries have opened their columns for the purpose of showing up the ill-effects to the consumer arising from the system of commissions, we fear but little general good will come of the *exposé* as regards the prices consumers have to pay to the retailers for the general requirements of daily life; but no doubt those able to go the market direct may look for some benefit for the future. It is satisfactory, therefore, to notice that, in the cigar trade, Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, supply the best cigars in quantities of not less than single boxes, at prices considerably lower than retailers, due to the fact that the intermediate profit from importer to retailer is dispensed with. It may be mentioned that the importing house in question supply samples of any brand and price to intending purchasers."

samples, Messrs. Sparke and Co. will, to intending purchasers, send an assorted small parcel of various brands at the price required, from which a selection may be made for order.* Having thus cleared this very important point, and shown, it may be hoped, the numerous advantages to be derived by the smoker from dealing direct with the importer, we may point out one or two of the special characteristics of Cuban planters and Cuban cigars. First, though, a word on the prices the genuine Havana cigars command in the markets of England, Russia, and the United States—the benighted inhabitants of other countries rarely see such things. It has already been remarked that the Spanish Government has done but little for Cuba, and the large majority of Spanish citizens are but too much inclined to respond “Manana” when pressed to adopt any plan for improvement, and until “to-morrow” everything is postponed. Consequently, although there is much virgin soil in the Cuban savannahs adapted to the growth of the finest

* The *West End News* eulogizes the convenience thus afforded to the consumer by saying in a leading article that, “Everyone having a large circle of acquaintances among smokers must have noticed the very varying opinions expressed even by sound judges of the comparative excellences of different brands. These differences of opinion place a somewhat serious obstacle in the way of persons who might otherwise order boxes of varied cigars well-known to fame. An easy way out of this difficulty, however, is found by first purchasing samples from some firm of recognized importers, such as Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, containing selections from numerous brands at the price the purchaser wishes to pay. All that is necessary is to name the figure and brands preferred, and whether it be 30s. or 120s. per hundred, a choice variety of the best Havanas will be supplied, amongst which will certainly be something to select a stock from, this well-known northern firm keeping on hand at all times large quantities of the finest growths of Cuba cigars at prices which would certainly startle the ordinary St. James’s or Bond-street *habitué*.”

The *Morning Post* also remarks that: “Smokers who like good cigars at a reasonable cost are frequently at a loss where to order their supplies, as the mere fashion or price of a particular brand is no guarantee that it will suit the individual taste of the purchaser. To meet this difficulty the plan has been adopted by Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., the cigar importers of Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, of forwarding samples to intending buyers, including selections from popular brands, at the prices desired, each cigar being marked with the rate per hundred, so that a judicious choice of the brand preferred may be made at leisure. Regarding the *modus operandi* alluded to, it may be mentioned that Messrs. Sparke and Co.’s stock has long been known to be of the best descriptions only, comprising all the choicest brands of the Havana, which in the present state of the market are now being sent out at remarkably moderate prices.”

tobacco, this remains untilled year after year because no one has the energy to break it. Therefore while the increase of wealth and the spread of luxury in the countries named has caused an enormous expansion in the demand for the best cigars, there has been no increase in the supply, so, as a matter of course, there is great competition among the importers to obtain what they specially require for their own customers, and, in accordance with the unvarying law of supply and demand, prices go up. To all this, let it be added that the civil troubles of the island during recent years have somewhat checked production, although, on the other hand, it is satisfactory to hear that at present the prospects of the next harvest are highly promising. So susceptible, however, is the tobacco plant to atmospheric influences, that too much hope must not be built on present appearances, as a short spell of unfavourable weather might render the harvest as bad as that of several recent years.*

Before proceeding to allude to a few of the well-known brands of Havana, we may take the opportunity of recording an incident which happened to a friend of the writer's, an officer in the Royal Navy, on the occasion of his making his first visit to the island some twenty-two years ago, when he was a young man. After dining with H.B.M.'s Consul, the official very kindly inquired what he could do for his guest in the island, and the answer that came was suggested naturally enough by the *locale*. The young sailor would like to get some first-rate weeds, and was delighted to hear the representative of Majesty direct his son-in-law, Mr. Frank T——, to accompany him to some of the cigar factories. The following morn-

* The *Weekly Register* evidently appreciates the importance to consumers of a good harvest, remarking that "it must be matter of congratulation to all who enjoy the luxury afforded by a good cigar to know that the present crops of tobacco are much superior to many previous crops, for it is a well-known fact that the best varieties are invariably in the greatest demand, and, of course, the supply of the best is never so great as that of the common kinds. It is in times of comparative scarcity among the best varieties of tobacco that the ordinary retailer makes his market, when there is little opportunity for competition as to quality. To bring good cigars within the reach of many, to give the connoisseur the advantage of cash payments, combined with the opportunity of obtaining good cigars on really moderate terms, Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of B 4, Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, well known as importers of the finest qualities, only supply single boxes containing a hundred at the wholesale price. This is a boon which, considering the present retail prices, cannot fail to be very extensively appreciated, and we understand that Messrs. Sparke supply samples by post at a trifling cost."

ing after discussing breakfast, the pair sallied out on their expedition in search of tobacco, and their first call was upon Cabana, the present proprietor of whose establishment Anselm G. del Valle married the great man's daughter and heiress. On Mr. T. delivering his father-in-law's message, the factor replied that if his visitor would take half his cigars new he should have the remainder *old*, the latter part of the reply being evidently intended as a great compliment to the Consul. Even then the stranger was not allowed to pick and choose as he liked, some cigars being under contract to the Czar and other ineffable personages in Europe, but after some difficulty he managed to secure some thousands of very fair cigars, and it will amuse modern connoisseurs to learn that some time afterwards he discovered that the great favour granted to him consisted in his *old cigars* having attained the mature age of *twelve months*. It may be added that the cigars refused to our friend would now be looked on as everyday affairs by the more luxuriously trained smoker of the present day.*

This little fact, by the way, should prove to the public, that, as the area of cultivation is no greater now than in 1855, as the demand is much larger, and as the crops have failed year after year, the ordinary retailer may well find it impossible to supply his customers with a really good weed at a fair cost, and even the large importers have to employ all their energy and capital to obtain the cigars they require.

One of the most popular and most widely known Havana names, for some time past, has been that of "Intimidad," and

* On which point the *American Traveller* sensibly remarks:—"Most assuredly the luxury which is the leading characteristic of the age has not allowed smokers to pass unscathed, and consequently our *jeunesse dorée* indulge habitually in cigars which in the days of their grandfathers were only to be found between the lips of the wealthiest planters of the Havana. One consequence of this change is that the stock of a really eminent importer of cigars represents a vast amount, both of capital and variety. As an example we may quote the trade catalogue of Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of Exchange Buildings, Liverpool, whose position is certified by the fact that they enjoy the patronage of many of the nobility, the leading clubs, and naval and military messes. Their price list embraces the leading characteristics of all the most famous growth of Havana, conspicuous amongst which we note the charge for Villar Villar's Reyna Fina, 57s. per hundred, the general price for this particular brand, the favourite of the Prince of Wales, being from 70s. to 75s. Such a reduction seems to be the rule in regard to all Messrs. Sparke's importations, each box of which is what it professes to be, so that the desirability of perusing their price list is manifest at a time when the soothing weed is such an expensive luxury."

this manufacturer has certainly contrived to suit the average English taste. Here again we have a large variety to choose from, as without counting the exquisite little Infantes, Flor Fina, at 29s., which are just the thing for a dozen whiffs when time is precious, the Intimidads range from the Regalia de la Reina at 35s. in Liverpool, or 50s. in London, to the "Regalia Britannica," quoted by Messrs. Sparke at 67s. and by the same retailer at 100s. Between these two classes, however, is one for which we confess to a special liking, and so dearly prize when inclined to enjoy a quiet smoke, that we give its name in full: "Intimidad, Regalia *Fina* de la Reina, Flor Fina." A single cigar of this brand it is almost impossible to purchase in London for less than a shilling, and it is not easily to be procured anywhere, so that Messrs. Sparke's quotation of 55s. will doubtless come as a revelation to many experienced smokers.

Take we next the name so dear to lady novelists, who seem to have taken it under their especial protection, but dear also to many of the most profound judges of the weed—Partagas. Sad to relate, it is doubtful whether this famous maker will ever again have anything to do with the manufacture of cigars, though doubtless his name will be retained by his successors, for he has sold every cigar he had in his possession and threatens retirement from business. May whoever follows him worthily maintain his fame! Already Partagas of the finest quality are very scarce, and nothing superior to his "Regalia de la Reina" is likely to be found in any retail shop; but in this Liverpool list we find the costly "Partagas Reina Victoria" quoted at 70s., and the inestimable, and soon to be priceless, "Partagas' Partagas" at 115s. per hundred.

It would, however, be tedious to go through the list name by name. Every practised smoker knows the quality and merits of such favourite brands as those of Cabarga, of Allones, of Bock, of Murias, and many many more, and for further information we may refer them to the sources from which we have obtained much of our own knowledge on the subject. There are, however, one or two names the odour of whose cigar still clings fondly about us, and who therefore could not be passed over without ingratitude. Let us commence with a word of advice to those who like plenty for their money, but like that plenty good. For its size and price the cigar known as "La Caoba: Reina Victoria," manufactured by J. Pasedo and Co., is perhaps the cheapest ever sent to this country from the island, being of extra size, and quoted at

41s. Valentin Arango is another maker, whose cigar may be depended on from the Caliope Reina at 24s. (a small cigar this) to the Cautiva Regalia Reina Fina at 43s. One of the most enterprising manufacturers in the Havana is Don Joaquin Ortiz, who only recently had the misfortune of being burnt out, but with the energy characteristic rather of an American than of a Spaniard, he is already in order again, and is certain to continue making good cigars. Most of his manufactures, by the way, are best known by some fancy title such as "High Life," while his best is perhaps that called "El Guacho," with the sub-mark of Regalia Britannica, which at fifty-three shillings per hundred, is a decidedly cheap and capital cigar, the only possible objection to it being that the leaf is perhaps too dark for the general English market. For the last we have reserved a *bonne bouche* indeed. Of all modern Havana manufacturers the first place must unquestionably be given to the late Don A. de Villar,* whose cigars are pronounced by all the very finest judges the best that are exported from the island. The words "Villar y Villar" on a box of cigars are indeed enough to make a man's mouth water, and to suggest

* That aristocratic journal the *Court Circular*, which is probably deep in the secrets of fashionable tradesmen, points out the evils of commissions and middlemen's profits in an article from which we print the following: "So many revelations have recently been made in the public press on the subject of professional and trade commissions that before long we may expect the complete extinction of that bugbear of economy—the middleman—who has hitherto in all classes of business helped to swell the cost of services rendered or goods supplied, and firms of respectability, in order to retain their status, must begin to act on the principle that direct business is the most satisfactory in the end to all parties. In the Havana cigar trade at Liverpool, the Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co., of Exchange Buildings, have long advocated this style of business, and have perfected a system of supplying direct to the consumer the particular cigars, as regards brand and quality, he may require at prices far below those of most retailers, the difference in cost being in several instances entirely due to the absence of intermediate profits. Another, and a very important feature in the system of business adopted by this firm, is the careful adjustment of the prices of all cigars, so as to admit a fair profit on every brand alike, thus securing to the purchasers of the cheapest cigars the same advantages as gained by the buyers of the most expensive brands, and *vice versa*. It appears that every facility is afforded to the public by Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co.'s system for obtaining full information as to the growth and quality of all cigars sold by them, as a reference to their price-lists will readily show, and altogether the firm is to be congratulated on having elaborated their arrangements for supplying the consumer direct, at a time when all classes are showing a determination to avoid the expenses consequent on intermediate profits."

an immediate move to the smoking room. And it matters little whether the box contains the little *Princesas*, which, from Liverpool, can be obtained for 30s., or the huge "*Imperiales*," or, though this is best of all, of the "*Reyna Fina, Flor Fina*," the cigar, be it remarked, which is rarely absent, in his moments of leisure, from the mouth of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. We wonder, by the way, what the Prince pays for them. In the London price list, from which we have so often quoted, their price is seventy shillings per hundred, but from Messrs. Sparke, they are but fifty-seven. Wherever they are procured, however, it is to be feared they will have to be purchased soon, for Madame Villar has recently gone to the Havana, consequent on her husband's death, to settle her affairs in the island, and it is by no means unlikely that the factory will change hands.

Of the "*Reyna Fina*" there are but a comparative handful now to be found in England, but a medium sized cigar from the same plantation bearing the special mark of "*Villar Regalia de la Reina, Flor Fina*," for which the London selling price is 55s., has gained the highest commendations from connoisseurs, and has been largely bought by Messrs. Sparke, who quote it at 35s. 6d. Among other brands which may safely be recommended to every smoker, let us enumerate Larranaga's "*Regalia Reina, F. F.*" and "*Reg. Londres, F. F.*," both of which are cigars of most unusual excellence for the price at which they are sold, and the exquisite "*Espanolas*," the two finest qualities of which, namely, "*Reg. Reina, Fina Flor*" and "*Reg. Reina Flor*," can be obtained in Liverpool for 55s. and 52s. per hundred respectively. One great object achieved in quoting the above prices must be alluded to. Not only has it been shown how much lower they are than those of the ordinary retailer, but in every case in which comparison is possible, they are below those of the Army and Navy and other Co-operative Stores, a fact which at once explains and justifies the many favourable notices for which Messrs. J. T. Sparke and Co. have so much cause to thank the public press. Indeed, the Army and Navy price list does not include Villar Villar's *Reyna fina* at all, the highest quality quoted being the *Reg. de la Reina*.

Surely now every reader will admit that he has had placed before him a variegated bouquet that must delight the heart of a smoker, and as he has also been told where he may procure the finest cigars without having to pay "famine prices"

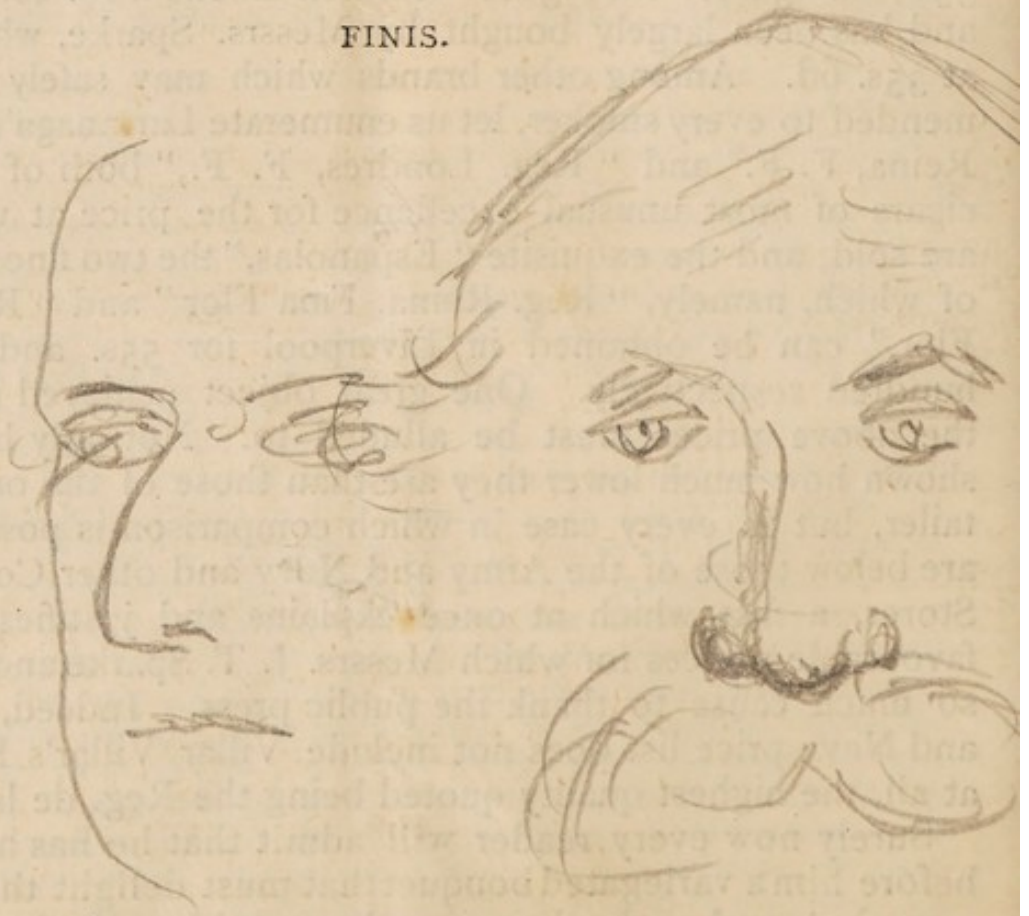
for them; he has but to stock his cabinet with those he most affects, and then sing with the poet thus—

“ Life is but a summer day,
So let us puff all cares away,”

or, while allowing to others the pleasure of indulging in pipe or cigarette, apostrophise the native leaf from which he derives comfort and solace, as—

“ Sublime tobacco, which from East to West,
Cheers the tar's labours or the Turckman's rest—
Which on the Moslem's ottoman divides
His hours, and rivals opium and his brides!
Magnificent in Stamboul, but less grand,
Though not less loved, in Wapping or the Strand;
Divine in hookas, glorious in a pipe
When tipped with amber, mellow, rich, and ripe;
Like other charmers, wooing the caress,
More dazzlingly when daring in full dress;
Yet we, true lovers, more admire by far
Thy naked beauties—Give me a cigar!”

FINIS.



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The Brands and Sizes underlined are specially recommended.

PRICE LIST OF THE FINEST HAVANA CIGARS

ISSUED BY

J. T. SPARKE & CO.,

B 4, EXCHANGE BUILDINGS, LIVERPOOL.

April, 1877.

As the Market Prices of Cigars vary in some degree from month to month, Messrs. J. T. SPARKE & Co., while putting forth the following as their average price list, beg to request all intending purchasers to send for latest quotations and also for samples.

CABANA.	Per 100	JOSE MORALES.	Per 100
Princesas Flor Fina.	30/6	Princesas Flor.	29/6
Kings do.		"Matilde" Regalia de	
Trabucos do.	38/0	la Reina do.	43/0
Regalia Londres..... do.	43/0	Flor de Morales do. .. do.	47/0
Regalia Reina Chica .. do.	50/0	LARRANAGA.	
Comme il faut do.	50/0	Princesas Flor Fina.	
Regalia Chica do.	55/0	Regalia de la Reina .. do.	35/0
Britanica Especial do.	63/0	Regalia Londres..... do.	43/0
INTIMIDAD.		EL GUACHO.	
Infantes..... Flor Fina.	29/0	Reina Fina Flor Fina.	
Regalia de la Reina .. do.	35/0	Regalia Reina Chica .. do.	43/0
Panetelas do.	39/0	Regalia Britanica do.	53/0
Regalia Fina de la Reina do.	55/0	ESPANOLA.	
Regalia Londres do.		Princesas Flor Fina.	30/6
Regalia Britanica do.	67/0	Regalia Reina Fina .. Flor.	52/0
PARTAGAS.		Regalia Reina Fina .. Flor Fina.	55/0
Cigarros Flor Fina.	26/6	Pinar del Rio Britanica	55/0
Princesas do.		Larrañaga Non Plus ultra Flor Fina.	57/0
Londres Flor.		A. Allones (Confedera-	
Regalia de la Reina .. Flor Fina.	48/0	cion) Princesas do.	26/6
Reina Victoria..... do.	70/0	R. Allones Patriotas .. do.	93/0
Partagas do.		Henry Clay Reinas Finas do.	33/0
VILLAR Y VILLAR.		Paz de China Princ de Gales do.	50/0
Princesas Flor Fina.	30/0	Punch do.	
Regalia de la Reina .. do.	35/6	Eleccion Reg. de la R. Fina do.	41/0
Regalia Reina Fina .. do.	55/0	P. Murias Meridianas.. do.	42/0
Reyna Fina do.	57/0	Flor de Cuba Regalia Chica do.	55/0
V. ARANGO.		Caoba Reina Victoria.. do.	41/0
Caliope Reina Flor Fina.	24/6	Conill Conchas do.	28/0
" Regalia de la		Belinda Reinas do.	26/0
Reina do.	28/6	José Arango Reg. de la	
Cautiva Regalia Reina		R. Fina..... do.	38/0
Fina do.	43/0	Zumalacarregui Reina	
A CABARGA Y CAMPA.		Especial do.	29/0
Corona Princesas Flor Fina.		Carolinas, Reg. Carolinas do.	49/0
" Reina Fina.... do.	31/0	MANILLA.	
" Regalia Reina		Cheroots do.	18/6
Fina do.	50/0	Cigars do.	18/6



TOBACCO BLOSSOM.

“Thus all adm’re thee, search around the globe;
The rich, the poor, the volatile, the grave;
Save the sweet fop, who fears to taint his robe,
The smock-faced fribble, and the hen-pecked slave.”