



[William Crosfield Letters](#)

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A Hamer Label off Florida
Friday November 11. 1859

My dear Brother

Isn't it queer how I
turn up at odd points where
you don't expect me? What is
fortune's wheel should turn
another once and land me at
Wolfehead or Liverpool? He shall see
how time goes on and what
ships come. Jamaica is soon
to say behind but old England
is in front. My patriotism is growing
fast to a gigantic size - they were
joking me last night at supper
about it. Yesterday afternoon we
put into Key West and there found
a British Government steamer
they tell me that my first saluta-
tion when I caught sight of the
Union crosser was "God bless her"
I hope it was. I found that to get
to Jamaica I must go to St Thomas
and then the risk of coming back.
Felt that it was too great and
gave it up with a longing look
ahead!!

Before I speak of wrecks and
wreckers, flying fish and sea hawks,
blue water and snowy foam let me
speak of Havana and the Grains.
By the bye hearing the old gentleman
speak of Newfound land of course
we mentioned Job's Brother and

I asked if he knew them. he said
"yes. I wrote to them today - the first
time for many many years."
I was only on shore forty eight
hours for this great chance to get
to Charleston was too good to
slip and would not happen
again for a fortnight or more.
You know all about it. The town
of Savannah is I should guess tho
by a parish in air - as you pass
along the canal you look into
the grey houses sometimes
into the courtyard and sometimes
into the parlor with two rows of
chairs set face to face but the
evening is the time to see into
the houses. Among the crowd one
meets Negroes, Indians, Spaniards
and Cubans, English and Americans
and oh what a pleasure it is to
say a passing word to some good
known Briton or his lady too.
Passes you in the street. Good
men and many women and
ladies go about in their
looking volantes, over head and
ears in moustie. Bright eyed
beaux look curiously at the
stranger and among them all
you come upon the curly haired
whit faced little boy of the American
consul who seemed to me to show
like a diamond among garnets.
The houses are in Moorish style

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unglazed windows with iron bars,
and huge barred doors form the
only breaks in the white washed
walls through the doors you look
into an open courtyard with
a fountain in the centre and
round the walls are ornamented
with old fashioned Moorish tiles.
The volante is almost the only
carriage in the town it is simply
a pair of huge wheels united as
they commonly are a pair of
long shafts except long are fastened
to them and at the other end a small
animal with an unusual proportion
of bone is fastened on him sits a
negro, usually as large as his
oliver, ~~sits~~ white between and
the wheels hangs a body with a
very low hood capable of holding
two persons. In narrow streets
with sharp corners they prove
the most useless thing that a
man could invent but a good
driver can manage them with
ease. Private ones are mostly
richly ornamented with silver and
the harness of the two horses is
also loaded with as much of the
precious metal as possible. When
two horses are used one is in the
shafts and the other is ridden
on inside by the guide it looks
a curious way but I suppose they
find it the best or they would not

have it so. They drive these vehicles in at the front door and it would seem they often keep them in the drawing room. The surrounding country looks like a continuous flower garden or hot house; the Plaza de Armas is a square in the town filled with the rarest and most lovely flowers, palm trees, bananas are too common to be noticed. At night we took a drive which I shall never forget, to General We three of us, made the acquaintance of Mr Key, attaché at the American Consulate who is a nephew of the celebrated late Barton Key of Washington. He is one of the smartest young men of these islands and twenty that I have met - full of anecdote and amusement; his description of yellow fever and the death of one man that he nursed was more graphic and awful than any I had heard of. Mr. Curran could hardly have told this story of Mr. Key with more striking effect. Life in Havana in the summer months must be full of the most fearful and harrowing experiences - and still the people seem to be devoted to gaiety and indifference to death. During our drive we passed some quintas that looked potted paradise the man

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floors reflecting, such was their polish, the gas lights every ornament and piece of furniture perfect in elegance of form but I will try to speak of the only one that I visited. Long avenues of tropical trees, the bright palm leaf shining in the moon, the country extending for miles all looked most inviting. Oh what a blessing if our ancestors had not tried to build Babel! All this must be a closed book to the unfortunate who knows not the language of the country. A cup of Cuban chocolate and then here was our apartment and we passed to our hotel Cubano as the old fashioned watchman was crying (I think almost the hour when ghosts enjoy themselves. The watchman before said is a curious animal with a dirty old lamp, imported some years since from London before the days of Peel, on his shoulder he carried a javelin, tho' of course I was not in the least excited I could almost have knocked one of them down from admiration of old customs. The following morning we called on Morales and took passage for Charleston. I was again to dine with the Consul General so

Made my way in an omnibus which bore the name of that universal creator of omnibuses, Mr. Stephen, New York. Found the house I was in quest of - a very small "mean" looking wooden building and was not a little disgusted at the undignified representation of my station, but when I had crossed the veranda and the lattice doors were opened for me in a large hall, the floor of colored marble, the high ceiling supported by massive pillars, a London piano stood in one corner and about the room were console tables and all the articles that you look for in a gentleman's drawing room except a stereoscope. This room forms the body or centre of the house and a door opposite the entrance opened also onto a veranda my eyes first alighted on a lovely scene of palm trees and flowers. I was asked to walk into a room at the side very neat and very cool when they exhibited to me only a pile of Punch's and Illustrated News till Mr. Crawford came and asked me to remain myself in the garden for a few moments. A parrot tree very pepper plant and flowers, the Stephanotis and

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a tree with a flower of snowy whiteness and trumpet shaped six inches long helped me till Mr. Crawford joined me. I have become so familiar with the Cockatoo bird sitting high bearing a single flower - that would more than fill a hat that now they pass often unremarked. I was then shown through the wings of the house which form two more sides of the quadrangle where they have every appliance for coolness - except in the kitchen where all the cooking is done on a tiled table in the middle of the room, like a smothered furnace the smoke of this finds its own way out of the room the Cuban cooks are like the Irish. Dinner was served very elegantly in a side room to six of us. It was pleasant to see a man just from Liverpool and be asked "would it be your lust that I met at the Cricket ground?" Mr. Grewe of Jamaica knows the town well and we had a pleasant chat after dinner. But what I most enjoyed was the society of an English Lady. Mrs. Crawford is a lady of English birth, well educated and ladylike and I assure you I had a very fine

time as I sat out in the veranda
and talked to her whilst the fire
flew round us. Oh it was human
personified! I believe I must have
a party of ladies when I get home
for I feel oh so sick of men. men
men!!! with only now and again
that you can venture to add "just".
On Thursday before sunrise we came
on board this most luxurious boat
where we are treated like gentlemen
by gentlemanly officers. We gave the
glorious for our last nautical friend
the Pranada and since then have
not begun to feel the first discomfort.
Today we have been in the region
we enter in four hours we must have
seen half a million of dollars worth
on the shore, in the form of four
vessels, some of this property we
have reason to think has been
destroyed; flying fish & porpoises
our companions in the water while
we have on board turtle and orange
the former we souped today. Florida
sunsets are the order of the day and
moonlight nights make me mad
with joy I am almost lunatic.
That I am at sea in a steamer
must be my excuse for bad writing
and you must please convey
a long message of love to every
body in inverse ratio to my shorter
absence. Remain your very
affectionate son W. P. Crofield