

Cuban Complications—How the United States may be Involved.

From the Detroit Free Press, (Democrat.)

The despatch from Washington stating that the British Minister had received from the English Consul at Havana an account of further outrages upon the English by Spanish authorities, on the high seas, shows a tendency of affairs in those waters to bring up the Cuban question, as involving the United States Government, in a new shape, and one which can only end, according to our consistent policy and theory from the beginning of our Government to the present day, in our acquisition of the island. According to this despatch, a Spanish war vessel hailed an English brig at sea, and the latter refusing to stop, was fired into by the Spaniards and sunk. The British Minister at Washington is reported to have considered the matter of sufficient authenticity and importance as to have immediately communicated it to his Government by the Atlantic cable.

In addition to this, it is reported that the English Government has already demanded reparation and indemnity from the Spanish Government for the outrage in British waters, committed by a Spanish cruiser, upon the American brig Mary Lowell, and, further, that complaint has been made by the same power in relation to an alleged outrage upon the Lizzie Walton, an English brig.

All these things point to difficulties and complications between England and Spain which may bring about English intervention in the Cuban revolution, English occupancy of the island for military purposes, or English acquisition of it by acts or results of war, or in the shape of indemnity from Spain, and the danger, even the seeming probability of such an attempt or of such a result, immediately involves the position of the United States in relation to it, and what our Government ought to do.

There is no obscurity or doubt as to what this is or should be. Our Government has always assumed that the right of self-protection authorized us to pursue a policy in relation to the Island of Cuba which, under no other circumstances, could we pretend to claim a right to enforce in any other part of the world. We have uniformly held that no power but Spain or the United States should ever hold the island so long as we could in any way prevent it. In 1823, during the administration of President Monroe, Mr. Adams our Secretary of State, instructed our Minister at St. James that "the transfer of Cuba to Great Britain would be an event unpropitious to the interests of the Union. The question both of our right and our power to prevent it, if necessary, by force, already obtrudes itself upon our councils; and the Administration is called upon, in the performance of its duties to the nation, at least to use all the means within its competency to guard against and forestall it."

In 1826, Mr. Clay, our Secretary of State, instructed, during the war between Spain and her colonies, that "if the war between Spain and the new Republic should continue, and the islands of Cuba and Porto Rico should become the object and the theatre of it, their fortunes have such a connection with the prosperity of the United States that they could not be indifferent spectators; and the possible contingencies of such a protracted war might bring upon the Government of the United States duties and obligations the performance of which, however painful it might be, they might not be at liberty to decline."

Mr. Gallatin, our Minister in London, writes to the State Department, in the same year, that Chateaubriand, in his speech to the House of Peers, said "that England could not take Cuba without making war on the United States, and that she knew it."

In 1837 Mr. Stevenson, Minister at London, wrote to our Government that he "felt justified in saying frankly to his Lordship, the English Minister of Foreign Affairs, that 'it was impossible that the United States could acquiesce in the transfer of Cuba from the dominion of Spain to any of the great maritime powers of Europe; that of the right of the United States to interfere in relation to these islands I presumed there could be little doubt; that while the general rule of international law which forbids the interferences of one State in the affairs of another was freely admitted, there were yet exceptions to the rule in relation to the laws of defence and self-preservation, which all nations acknowledged, and that the present was precisely such a case; that in this view, and with a single desire to guard against possible difficulties, I deemed it proper to say what I did, and hoped it would be received in the spirit in which it was offered.'"

Mr. Forsyth, in 1840, instructed Mr. Vail at Madrid: "Should you have reasons to suspect any designs on the part of Spain to transfer voluntarily her title to the island, whether of ownership or possession, and whether permanent or temporary, to Great Britain or to any other power, you will distinctly state that the United States will prevent it at all hazards, as they will any foreign military occupation under any pretext whatever."

Mr. Daniel Webster, in 1843, while Secretary of State, instructed that "the Spanish Government has long been in possession of the policy and wishes of this Government in regard to Cuba, which have never changed, and has been repeatedly told that the United States would never permit the occupation of that island by British agents, or forces, under any pretext whatever."

Mr. Buchanan, as Secretary of State under President Polk, instructed our Minister to Madrid that, "by direction of the President, I now call your attention to the present condition and future prospects of Cuba. The fate of this island must ever be deeply interesting to the people of the United States. We are content that it shall continue to be a colony of Spain. Whilst in her possession we have nothing to apprehend. Besides, we are bound to her by the ties of ancient friendship, and we sincerely desire to render them perpetual. But we can never consent that this island shall ever become the property of any other European power. In the possession of Great Britain, or any other strong naval power, it might prove ruinous both to our domestic and foreign commerce, and even endanger the union of the States. The highest and the first duty of every independent nation is to provide for its own safety; and acting upon this principle we should be compelled to resist the acquisition of Cuba by any powerful maritime State with all the means which Providence has placed at our command." And Mr. Everett, Secretary of State in 1852, concluded his notes to the English and French Ministers, rejecting all idea of a tripartite treaty between the three powers to guarantee Cuba to Spain, by saying: "No Administration of this Government, however strong in public confidence in other respects, could stand a day under the odium of having stipulated with the great Powers of Europe, that in no future time, under no change of circumstances, by no amicable arrangement with Spain, by no act of lawful war, (should that calamity unfortunately occur,) by no consent of the inhabitants of the island, should they, like the possessions of Spain on the American continent, succeed in making themselves independent; in fine, by no overruling necessity of self-preservation, should the United States ever make the acquisition of Cuba."

It will thus be seen that we have consistently held, and Europe has been constantly informed, that not only the United States would prevent the transfer of Cuba temporarily or permanently to any other power, but also that we have refused to prejudice or hamper our own designs upon it by a guarantee of it to Spain. More than that, however, we have never sought to conceal our desire and intention, if possible, to acquire it ourselves as an essential means of defence and self-preservation.

Under these circumstances, should the complications in the revolution lead to or seriously endanger the possession or occupancy by the Spanish Government of the island, the time will have come for the intervention of our own Government, and the acquisition of the island for ourselves at all hazards. It will be demanded by our own highest interests. It is desired by the Creole population, and it is our long-heralded policy of self-defence. It may not be as difficult as might be imagined. Spain needs money so badly, and has such poor credit as just to have taken a foreign loan at twenty-nine and a half cents on the dollar. England is reported to be pressing for reparation and indemnity for Spain. The United States needs Cuba for self-defence, and the people of Cuba desire annexation. Surely the position is such that all difficulties might be settled acceptably by a purchase for cash, were it not for Spanish pride. There are, indications, however, that even this pride must fall.