

CONCERNING MASSACRE.

Early in February the Cuban leader Cespedes addressed the Government of the United States manifesting, among other things, that in the hope of speedy recognition he had not adopted the policy of reprisals against the constant atrocities of his foe. The Cuban Junta to-day answer the charge that the late decree of murder by Valmaseda was anticipated by one from Cespedes equally merciless. They show indirectly that Cespedes had paused, as he himself said, before determining upon any measure of general retaliation. His proclamation to this effect, of which we published a translation, bears date of the 18th February, and is the one upon which the Spanish agents rest their defense of Valmaseda's bloody decree of April. After recounting the cruelties committed on his captured soldiers, and instancing his own forbearance, Cespedes feels provoked to decree "reprisal" against the enemy in its most ample terms; "blood for blood; execution for execution; extermination for extermination." These are desperate words, and uttered by a man of will.

We are inclined to believe the Junta when they say that Count Valmaseda's order was not immediately excited by this decree. With or without a code, he had, in all probability, been previously exercising his talent of assassination in the neighborhoods which he had overawed. Valmaseda is said to possess a fat head and a cruel heart, and like many other provincial veterans of Spain is not troubled with piteous scruples. He must have practiced a great deal in the art of killing before he could find in his heart to decree the death of all males over fifteen years of age found absent from home without proper cause, together with the destruction of houses, and something like violence of a suspicious sort to defenseless women. The order of Cespedes following his proclamation is more considerate, since it grants pardon to the Spanish soldier and punishes the native traitor according to circumstances. Cespedes, it here appears, has shrewdly availed himself of what he considers a fierce necessity to direct a deadly threat against such natives as fight in the Spanish ranks. He may have aimed at the mobilized negroes and mulattoes of whom we have lately heard.

The Junta have not referred to the Spanish proclamations of massacre antecedent to the decree of Cespedes, and we shall here endeavor to refresh theirs and the general memory. The first proclamation of Valmaseda, issued at Vertientes, was a decree of death. On the 18th of October, Gen. Mena, in Puerto Principe, officially directed all insurgents to be shot, and prescribed the same fate to their instigators and concealers. On the 12th of October, at Manzanillo, Col. Reguera proclaimed that all residents who did not show themselves in forty-eight hours should be shot. On the 17th of October Gen. Ravenet, at Santiago de Cuba, ordered all insurgents to be tried by court-martial and shot. Worse still, at Manzanillo, on the 10th November, Valmaseda attained the climax of military barbarism and despotism. He ordered that after date insurgents or conspirators, those who will edit, print, or circulate subversive writings or news, those who may interrupt or destroy telegraphic communication, and those generally who may aid or abet the enemy,—should be shot. We have good reason to suspect that orders such as these were subsequently issued by Spaniards in other parts of the country. Who doubts that hundreds fell victims to these butchery and cowardly decrees? Gen. Cespedes has at least the plea in his favor of having been most intensely and savagely provoked to reprisal. That his decree is not an indiscriminate license to slaughter makes it comparatively moderate, but even its moderation must shock a public unused to the spectacle of a war fought out on both sides with all the tragedy of an ineradicable hatred. It is plain that we have not yet begun to realize the savage earnest of the war in Cuba. For the sake of civilization and of the future, we wish that we could successfully plead or protest against its horrors.