

# CUBAN AFFAIRS.

## END OF THE REBELLION.

### Consul General Plumb's Report.

#### Negotiations With Spain for the Purchase of the Island.

#### Four Propositions from the United States and Four from Spain.

### CUBA WILL SOON BE OURS.

WASHINGTON, Jan. 9, 1870.

If any confirmation were needed of the despatch I sent you some days ago as to the real status of the Cuban revolution it could be found in the report since made to the State Department by Consul General Plumb. That gentleman has just returned from an extensive tour through Cuba, in the course of which he had the most favorable opportunities for correct observation, and was afforded facilities not enjoyed by either of the contending parties.

Statements coming from either the Spanish authorities or the Cuban leaders might well be taken *cum grano salis*. Interest would naturally give the most favorable hue to reports emanating from the one side or the other. But it is fair to suppose that Mr. Plumb, being a United States official, had no interest one way or the other, and that what he might say or write would be entitled to be received as the impartial testimony of one who had no other object than the elucidation of the truth and the furnishing of correct information to his government.

Now, when I add to the above the further fact that when Mr. Plumb went out to Cuba to represent our government he was not an ardent sympathizer with the revolutionary movement, perhaps it will attach greater weight to his statements *pro Hispania*. But when I assert that Plumb's sympathy with the Cubans was so strong before his departure for Havana as to induce the usually discreet Spanish Minister here (Señor Roberts) to express to Secretary Fish surprise that an avowed enemy of Spain should be appointed to act as Consul General in the "ever faithful Isle," at a time when propriety suggested the selection of a perfectly impartial personage to discharge the duties of the post faithfully and satisfactorily to both Spain and the United States, I have supplied a still stronger reason for believing the calm and dispassionate report which Mr. Plumb has sent fit to submit to the State Department.

And I know whereof I write when I venture to state that Señor Roberts did thus converse with Secretary Fish about the appointment of Plumb as Consul General to Havana. I know that Roberts' conversation on the subject assumed very nearly the form of a protest against Plumb's appointment and confirmation.

Well, this Plumb's report is summed up very briefly—that the rebellion in Cuba is practically at an end. In other words it is a melancholy and deplorable confirmation of my former despatch on the same subject.

Mr. Plumb states that there are a few thousand rebels still in an attitude of declared hostility to Spanish ascendancy in Cuba, but that they are destitute entirely of political organization and have almost no discipline in a military point of view. They are scattered in various localities, he declares, and confine themselves to the prosecution of a guerilla warfare, not being strong enough to confront the Spaniards in open fight in any considerable numbers, and not holding a single position of the slightest importance in a strategic or political view.

Mr. Plumb adds that this style of warfare, owing to the peculiar topography of the island, can be carried on by the Cubans for years, but that while of course it will be embarrassing to the Spanish authorities it cannot strengthen the cause of the patriots in any degree. They will never, he thinks, make the slightest headway by their present *modus operandi*.

Now this is a pretty stunning report right on the heels of my recent statement that the Cuban rebellion is on its last legs. But I assure you I give it just as I have obtained it from the highest sources of information, and that I neither mitigate nor exaggerate. It is a staidly plain statement, purposely so on account of my own sympathies in the opposite direction.

#### THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH SPAIN ABOUT CUBA.

The secret history of our diplomatic correspondence and conversations with the authorities of Spain concerning the rebellion in Cuba, and our desire to put an end to it, either by tendering our good offices or by actual purchase of the island, has never been fully published. I am not sure that I have all the essential facts to give a connected account of these negotiations, but within the past few days I have become possessed of some desired links in the chain of required facts, which, I think, enable me to supply you with a better statement of the negotiations than has yet found its way into print. In giving this statement I shall have to republish some matters which have from time to time appeared in my telegraphic correspondence.

#### TENDER OF THE "FRIENDLY OFFICES" OF OUR GOVERNMENT.

On September 3 Minister Siskies received a despatch from Secretary Fish directing him, in view of the deplorable condition of affairs in Cuba, to tender to the Spanish government the "friendly offices" of the United States in the hope of bringing about an amicable understanding between the contending parties. Be it noticed that we did not offer to mediate, but to interpose merely "our friendly offices." There is a distinction here which perhaps the mass of readers do not comprehend. Mediation is an interposition which can only be suggested or offered when two independent nations are at war, or have some grave subject of controversy pending. "Friendly offices" are allowable when a difficulty, warlike or otherwise, exists between a recognized nation and some of its dependencies or colonies, as between Spain, the home government, and Cuba, the colony governed.

Minister Siskies on receiving this dispatch communicated without delay with the Spanish government. In an interview with Silveira, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain, General Siskies formally tendered the good offices of our government.

I believe, but am not certain, that subsequently Siskies put this tender in the shape of a formal diplomatic communication in writing. However, the tender was received by Silveira on the part of Spain with strong expressions of thanks, and accepted without hesitation. So far so good.

The next step was the settlement of the terms of a basis to open the negotiations, or good offices thus accepted. Secretary Fish made the initiative. He drew up four propositions, which he proposed as the basis for the settlement of the difficulties between Spain and her colony.

These propositions I was able to send you at the time, but for the sake of a clear understanding I repeat them now. They are as follows:—

- First—Recognition of Cuban independence.
- Second—Indemnification to Spain, to be paid from the customs revenue of the island.
- Third—Abolition of slavery.
- Fourth—Cessation of hostilities pending the settlement on the above terms.

The indemnification provided for in the second proposition was to have been obtained by the hypothecation of the customs of the island, which amount to from \$15,000,000 to \$18,000,000 a year, sufficient to secure the interest of whatever might be agreed upon as the purchase money, and leaving a fat sum for a sinking fund. Free Cuba, in the character of a new republic, of course would have little credit, and it was proposed to permit her to issue bonds for the payment of, say \$100,000,000, guaranteed by the United States, which proposed to act as trustees of the revenues of the island to see that the money should be properly applied. The United States would in this way, it was supposed, exercise for a good term such a supervisory authority and influence over Cuba as would enable her to shape the policy and education of Cuba, while at the same time guaranteeing the payment of the \$100,000,000.

or whatever other sum might be agreed upon, by indemnification to Spain.

These propositions, having been accepted by the President and Cabinet, were forwarded to Minister Siskies, with instructions that he should read them to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs for Spain. Just about this time the rebellion showed signs of increasing strength in Cuba, and the moment for negotiations was deemed opportune. About the same time also Siskies was directed to institute negotiations for the purchase of Cuba by our government.

Siskies did not fully carry out his instructions on these points, and in failing to do so he is considered to have made a great, though the only, mistake since his appointment. He was directed to send the propositions of Secretary Fish to the Spanish government. Instead of doing so he sought an interview with Silveira and informed him what we proposed as the basis of agreement.

A discussion of a friendly character took place at this interview between Siskies and Silveira, during which the latter expressed the opinion that an indispensable condition precedent of treating with the insurgents ought to be the laying down of their arms by the Cubans. If the latter would consent to this condition then Spain would be willing to allow the question of the independence of Cuba to be decided by the votes of the people of the island.

Siskies communicated this and some other propositions to Secretary Fish. The latter refused for a moment to entertain the first or second propositions. For the Cubans to lay down their arms, he thought, would be expecting too much, in view of the fact that the Spaniards would have their volunteers and regulars in full force on the island. Then what a mockery would any election be for the Cubans under such circumstances! How could they vote in the face of intimidation and armed surveillance? Mr. Fish declined the propositions, therefore, and instructed Siskies to insist upon the original basis as the only one that would be entertained either by the Cubans or the United States.

Siskies did this, and the negotiations were progressing favorably, after the consideration and rejection of a variety of terms, when the Republican *éméute* occurred in Spain.

The political condition of Spain at this juncture was alarming. The people were split up into several parties. There was the *de facto* government party, the Carlists, the republican party, the Church party and the adherents of three or four more, led by men ambitious to yield up supreme power. The first of these was antagonized by all the rest. Prim and Serrano had a rôle to play that called for all the skill and daring they possessed.

Siskies, like a shrewd diplomat, comprehended the situation. Seeing that the different Spanish factions would avail themselves of the negotiations for a purchase of Cuba to make political capital, he telegraphed here asking for discretionary powers in the matter of the negotiations, and to be allowed, if necessary in his judgment, to withdraw our offer of friendly offices.

Secretary Fish promptly answered this despatch, granting all the discretion to Minister Siskies that he might require.

In the meantime Rawlins had, by his enthusiastic advocacy of Cuban acquisition, induced our administration here to instruct Siskies to inform the Spanish government that unless Spain should consent to sell Cuba to the United States within ten days we would be constrained to acknowledge the independent republic of Cuba.

When Siskies received this startling despatch he thought it was time to submit Fish's four original propositions to Silveira. He, therefore, wrote a note incorporating these propositions, and received a written answer, containing a Spanish substitute for the American basis of settlement. This substitute was as follows:—

- First—Absolute disarmament of the Cuban revolutionary army.
- Second—Indemnification to Spain for all the Spanish property destroyed on the island, to be guaranteed by the United States.
- Third—The people of Cuba to be allowed to vote freely on the question of separation from Spain, and full protection to be granted to such Cubans as might be sent to treat with the Spanish authorities.
- Fourth—A general amnesty to be granted to the insurgents.

Siskies thereupon wrote a note to Silveira withdrawing his tender of friendly offices, but not withdrawing the note containing Fish's four propositions. Siskies felt he had no authority to withdraw the proposed basis of settlement, although he had full license to withdraw or not, in his direction, the tender of our friendly offices.

This effectually disposes of the oft-repeated assertion that Spain rejected our offer of mediation. The fact is we never offered to "mediate," so to speak. We only tendered one good office, and withdrew them of our own volition.

But though the Spanish newspapers teemed with announcements of our alleged withdrawal of a tender of mediation the Spanish government never once denied them or endeavored to set the public mind right on the subject. This greatly annoyed both Siskies and Fish.

In a despatch you published yesterday I let you into the secret of the Cabinet resolve to demand the sale of Cuba within a fixed period or to recognize the infant republic. I need not, therefore, repeat that, as it must still be fresh in the minds of your readers.

#### PRESENT STATUS OF THE QUESTION.

I can only add now that the question is in about this state at the present writing. Both Prim and Serrano are in favor of selling us Cuba, and I know that Siskies has assurances of that kind. Prim and Serrano are only afraid of the unsettled state of affairs in their country.

Were there only some strong government established in Spain, it matters not whether the Prim or the Serrano faction might be in control, there exists no doubt that in a very short time negotiations would be reopened and result in transferring the "ever faithful" to the ever free republic of the United States.

By the way, how unexpectedly my despatch to you the other day about the conspiracy of the Serrano partisans to make that veteran almost a king has been verified. The very next day a cable telegram from Madrid announced the fact, and also the resignation of the Ministry. This demonstrates that my sources of information are perfectly reliable.

#### FISH NOT AVERSE TO THE PUBLICATION OF HIS CORRESPONDENCE ABOUT CUBA.

Now as to another point, it is a mistake to suppose that Secretary Fish is averse to having all the correspondence about Cuba given to the public. So far as he is personally concerned he considers that a publication at this time would not be damaging to himself or the administration. But there are strong reasons why he should not consent to their publication yet. The principal reason is that no one can tell yet what may be the result of the present complicated state of affairs in Spain. He feels assured that should either Prim or Serrano succeed our negotiations for the purchase of Cuba would be reopened, with every probability of a speedy consummation favorable to our wishes. But a premature publication just now might have the effect of raising such a clamor in Spain as to sweep from the political field both Serrano and Prim, and carry into power some one pledged to resist the sale of Cuba to our government on any terms.

#### Spaniards and Cubans Over-Estimating Their Positions and Strength—Captain General De Rodas' Latest Proclamation—His View of Affairs in Cuba.

WASHINGTON, Jan. 9, 1870. The administration has taken no recent action on the affairs of Cuba, nor is it known that any is contemplated. Such official, though meagre, accounts as have been received show that both the Spaniards and the Cubans exaggerate their respective strength and positions, while the truth is represented to be that a regiment of Spanish troops can march to any town or locality, subject only to annoyances occasionally, of small bodies of insurgents.

The following despatch was yesterday received in Washington, direct from Havana:—

The *Gazette*, the official organ of the government, published on the 6th instant an important proclamation of the Captain General, intended to define the present situation of the island. The Captain General congratulates the country upon its actual prosperity. New troops and reinforcements, although not needed to suppress the insurrection, have come from Spain to fulfil its obligations towards Cuba and to protect the island against murderers and robbers. He then refers to the threats of homicide and incendiarism made by certain bands of men, against which precautions are now being taken in garrisoning plantations with troops and civil guards to save them from destruction. Men-of-war have also been sent from Spain to

and to prevent the landing on the island of filibuster expeditions coming from outside. The Captain General says that there was never before in the island such a state of affairs as could be considered as a state of war; but now peace has been so fully re-established that there is no place in the island where the administration of public affairs or the action of the civil courts is not entirely recognized.

#### Movements of Spanish War Vessels—The Steamer El Rayo Suspected—What is Thought of Serrano as Dictator.

HAVANA, Jan. 9, 1870. The Spanish frigate *Gerona* will soon sail for Venezuela, for the purpose of watching the steamer *El Rayo*. The *El Rayo* was formerly the *U. S. Carler*, and was sold by citizens of the United States to the Colombian government. A rumor prevails that she has been sold to the Cuban insurgents. The *Gerona* will also look after Spanish interests generally in that quarter.

The *Foz de Cuba* publishes an article on the Spanish dictatorship, in which the writer says that the elevation of Marshal Serrano to the position of Dictator would be unnecessary and untimely.