

JAMES WATSON WEBB AS A DIPLOMAT AND REPORTER, AND ON THE RAFFAGE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

Although Mr. Webb has given to the world a very interesting and patriotic letter on the subject of Cuban affairs, for which he has received due credit, yet on another point he appears to have allowed his prejudices to get the better of his judgment, and his difficulties with Admirals Godon and Davis seem to have made him so bitter against the navy generally that he is now attempting to mislead the public in regard to naval affairs in the West Indies. His special views, as put forth in his letter from Havana, published in the Tribune, are of no moment here, but as naval matters are under discussion just at present some of his most offensive remarks require to be noticed, not for the purpose of bringing him into disrepute, but to keep the public posted on naval affairs. It is well known that Mr. Webb has for the last four years endeavored to obtain the command of our Brazil fleet, and those who have read his evidence before the Committee on Foreign Relations will not fail to recognize what a "big Indian" he considered himself and of how little consequence he considered Admirals Godon and Davis and the Navy Department. This was simply because the two former refused to involve the United States in a war to please him—to say nothing of leaving his communications at a grocery corner—and because the Secretaries of State and of the Navy decided that those officers were not only right, but had shown the greatest prudence. It does not seem proper that Ministers should direct our commanders abroad. It would involve the republic in constant difficulties, and it was well for this country that our navy was represented in South Atlantic waters by two officers who could not be influenced even by so wily a diplomat as the Chevalier Webb.

Both Admirals Davis and Godon soon discovered that Mr. Webb was of a very impulsive nature, and if his advice was taken would cause us to violate every principle of international law and courtesy to satisfy his bellicose propensities. From the time of his failure to impose his peculiar ideas upon the commander-in-chief of our Brazil fleet Webb has lost no opportunity to vent his spleen upon the navy, and is now endeavoring to have it laid up. There are radicals of all kinds about just like Webb, whose councils, if followed, would put our political fabric out of joint merely to gratify their own whims.

When the Chevalier returned from Brazil he was not in a humor to be trifled with; and no wonder. Had not an admiral in the American Navy left his communications to Webb at a corner grocery, and had not another admiral refused to go to war in order that the American minister might have a good appetite for his breakfast? These are facts known to the people of this country, who, having had enough of war, feel very thankful to the admirals in question for not encouraging more of it, to say nothing of leaving the letters at the corner grocery. It was in a bad frame of mind that Mr. Webb appeared before the Committee on Foreign Relations and gave them such instructions in international law that, as he says, the committee were determined to scathe Godon and Davis, lay up the greater part of the navy and turn over the command of all that was left to the Chevalier to make war with.

This is his view of the question; but then he has always been impulsive, which leads him to state matters so entirely different from the actual fact that he would seem to have been educated solely in the Munchausen school. Webb will find however, when the committee make their report, that he had better modify his views on naval matters. While the Committee on Foreign Relations were in session and discussing the affairs in Paraguay, Vice Admiral Porter and Assistant Secretary Hunter, of the State Department, were summoned at the same time before them, and closely questioned regarding the claims put forth by the Chevalier as to the powers of a Minister Plenipotentiary over the commander-in-chief of the fleet. Mr. Hunter has spent a lifetime in the Department of State, and may be said to have the whole code, international and diplomatic, at his fingers' ends. Vice Admiral Porter has commanded the largest fleet that has ever been under one officer, and his varied experience enables him to distinguish between the claims of Mr. Webb and the duties of naval commanders who are specially instructed by the Navy Department. Before leaving the committee room both these gentlemen gave testimony that convinced the committee that to follow Webb's policy would be fatal to the best interests of the country, and so conclusive were their arguments that the investigation closed, and Webb and his policy were consigned to the "tomb of the Capulets."

The Chevalier has not forgotten this rebuff, and in his usual style has, in a letter from Havana, attacked the Navy Department and the Vice Admiral. He asserts that our citizens residing in Cuba are left to the mercy of the cruel Spaniards, who go about shooting people for amusement, while American naval officers,

—Instead of mounting barbed steeds,
To fright the souls of fearful wives, —
Are capering nimbly in a lady's chamber,
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.

As the remarks of the Chevalier are pertinent to the subject of naval defence, and may be the means of awakening our legislators to the necessity of providing the Navy Department with the means of protecting our citizens abroad, it may be well to enlighten the Chevalier and at the same time the readers of the Herald as to the true state of the case. All the statements of Webb in regard to naval mismanagement are imaginary from beginning to end. He would make a capital sensation novelist, but a very poor newspaper writer, for the people of this country want truth, not fiction—which latter fills his letter.

When the present administration came into power there were in the West India fleet but five vessels, mounting in all twenty-five guns. Four of these vessels were driven North by the yellow fever, their crews having been rendered unfit for service by lying in Spanish ports. Since then the present Navy Department has sent the following vessels to the West Indies, viz:—the Severn, fifteen guns; Strata, five guns; Nantasket, five guns; Nipic, five guns; Yantic, five guns; Saratoga, fourteen guns; Pownatan, fourteen guns; Tuscarora, nine guns; Seminole, six guns; Guard, six guns; Dictator (iron-clad), two fifteen inch guns; Saugus (iron clad), two fifteen inch guns, while the Congress, of fifteen guns, and the iron-clads Ferrer and Montanombah are on their way to join the fleet.

Now, here is a poser for Webb, and unless he can disprove it he must come under the category of having made a mistake, to say the least of it. The fact is that the present Navy Department, owing to the maladministration complained of by Mr. Webb, reinforced the West India fleet with fourteen vessels, out of thirty-five in commission. This is all the Department can put afloat, because Congress has limited the number of men. Ships cannot be got to sea in sufficient numbers to satisfy the desires of everybody. Congress refuses the supplies.

As to Mr. Webb's assertion, that no ships have been kept in Spanish ports, it is entirely untrue. Our iron-clads have visited the most important places, and during the great prevalence of yellow fever the vessels were kept at Key West and communicated freely with Havana. Only two outrages upon American citizens have been committed. Both of these were investigated, and in one case the guilty person expiated his offence upon the gallows. The commander-in-chief of the station has an extensive command and cannot at all times be in Havana when Mr. Webb is there. The fact of his being there would naturally deter our navy officers from going to Havana, for his desire to regulate the navy and his antipathy to admirals are well known, and although officers are disposed to admit his abilities as a diplomatist they do not care to come in contact with him under any circumstances.

NASCA.