

CUBA.

The Reported Emancipation of Slaves by the Captain General a Fraud—An Attempt to Impose on the American People—The Emancipado System in Cuba—The Corruptions Connected With It—Emancipation Not in the Spanish Programme.

HAVANA, March 25, 1870.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD:—

An Associated Press telegram which appears in your issue of the 25th ult., and which, originally placed in the Eagle's mails, has just arrived here, is calculated to create a wrong impression, and gives color of truth to the charge of General Webb that the press agent in this city is engaged in a systematic attempt to deceive the American people. The telegram reads as follows:—"The Captain-General has issued an important decree; it grants liberty to over 2,000 negroes, prisoners of war, who had been hired out to labor by the government, with the understanding that they were to become slaves after a certain date." This statement argues great ignorance on the part of the author or a wilful perversion of facts. The decree of the Captain-General, as it appeared in the *Gazette*, is as follows:—

SUPERIOR POLITICAL GOVERNMENT OF THE PROVINCE

OF CUBA.

DECREE.—By virtue of the faculties with which I am invested, and in keeping with the royal decree of the 27th October, 1865, I think fit to extend my decree (rescripto) of the 21st of September ult., declaring exempt from dependency on the government the expeditions entitled Puerto Escondido, Cabanas 10, Cabanas 55, Cabanas San Diego de Novez, and Trinita 1.

In consequence thereof the employers (*los patronos*) who have in their service emancipated (*emancipados*) of the referred to expeditions will present them in the Secretary's office of this superior government within the period of one month, in order that, after the usual formalities, they may receive their letters of exemption.

At the same time the governors and lieutenant governors will publish this direction in the periodicals of their respective jurisdictions, so that it may come to the notice of the holders of these emancipados, and they cannot allege ignorance of it.

CABALLERO DE RÓDAS.

HAVANA, Feb. 24, 1870.

As can be seen from the tenor of the decree itself it is no new thing. It is "in keeping with the royal decree of the 27th of October, 1865," made by Queen Isabella, and it is to be carried out with the "usual formalities." In order to a proper appreciation of it and to show that it is in no sense "an initiatory step toward the emancipation of the colored people," a few facts are recited in reference to these "emancipados." The character is a peculiarity of the law of this island. The term is applied to those Africans taken from captured slave ships, and which, in contravention of the spirit of those treaties for the suppression of the slave trade entered into by Spain with the civilized nations of Christendom, have been practically enslaved here. Owing to the great want of labor on the island these unfortunates, on their arrival here, have been hired out by the government to the planters for four dollars per month. This once done the negro was in a much worse condition than the slave himself; for while the latter was privileged to buy himself at any time when he was able, to change his master for such price as might be fixed upon by arbiters appointed by law, with other guarantees for his protection, the poor emancipado became practically a slave for life, and the formalities thrown around his release were such as to render an attempt at it hopeless; and only when the "First Authority" saw fit to use his faculties in "keeping with the decree of the 27th October, 1865," was he restored to that liberty which was his inherent right, and of which he had been most unjustly deprived by the representatives of Christian Spain. It will be seen that in no sense was he a "prisoner of war," and certainly there was no understanding that he "was to become a slave after a certain date." The case of a certain emancipado is well known here and often referred to. He drew \$12,500 in the lottery. His employer, a respectable and humane man, immediately set about obtaining his release or discharge, but such were the difficulties which he encountered at the start that he was obliged to give over the effort, though the money drawn from the lottery was at his disposition in accomplishing the object, and, for all that is known, the man is still serving, unless, happily, he belongs to one of the expeditions mentioned in the above decree.

As with every affair of this island, fraud and corruption from the start entered into the hiring of emancipados. Under the card they were to be let to those planters who had not sufficient capital to buy slaves; but this soon became a dead letter, and the capture of an expedition was regarded as a godsend to the officials having in charge the disposal of the negroes. It is known that one lieutenant governor in the central part of the island made \$67,000 out of one expedition by receiving from the planters a *douceur* of from twenty to thirty ounces for each negro. The buying and selling of these was as openly carried on and as well understood by the people and government as that of the slaves. A remarkable fact may also be mentioned here. Upon estates where emancipados were employed no slaves were ever reported dead. If perchance one died he was given the name of an emancipado, who immediately assumed his; a consideration was given to the *cellado*, or such official as had cognizance of the death, and the poor victim became a slave in reality, only he had been compelled to assume a personality not his own. In this way a large proportion of the emancipados have been reported dead who are living and slaves.

Herein I have but glanced at this system of emancipados. It would require columns of your valuable paper to give a full knowledge of its frauds and enormities. My only object has been to show that the Captain General has freed no slaves, has taken no initiatory steps toward emancipation, though doubtless for moral effect in the United States he would be happy to create such an impression through his agents here and elsewhere.

In reference to the number released by the decree it is grossly exaggerated. If my memory serves me the expeditions referred to are all old, and it is very probable that comparatively few of the negroes brought by them remain alive on the reports. After consulting with those familiar with such matters I am satisfied 200 would be a high estimate. As to the measure being warmly applauded by the liberal and progressive party there remains the important fact that there is no such party now, either in fact or name. The truth is, no one thought the decree of the slightest importance, save to the few unfortunates affected by it. It indicates nothing.