

CUBAN AFFAIRS IN SPAIN.

Minister Sickles' Negotiations in the Case of the Steamer Lloyd Aspinwall.

MADRID, April 20, 1870.

General Sickles pinned Segasta (Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) in a corner the other day respecting the American steamer Lloyd Aspinwall, which, your readers will remember, was seized by the Spaniards on the high seas while on her voyage from Hayti to the United States. He represented the serious nature of the case, dwelling upon the fact that at the time of the seizure one of the passengers on board was an American official, bearing government despatches; that the vessel carried no contraband of war, and was captured on the high seas. He adduced other important evidence to prove the illegality of the seizure. He told Secretary Segasta that the American government had been so far forbearing, in consideration of the disordered and unhappy state of affairs in Spain, but that the time had arrived when the question must be satisfactorily settled. He demanded an unconditional "Yes," or "No," as to whether the Spanish government would, or would not, immediately release the vessel, and indemnify all losses and damages.

Señor Segasta at once saw there was no fencing the question with the General upon the matter. The homethrust was too determined, prompt and sure to be parried. Though somewhat of a diplomatic fox, he soon found that "doubling" would not do. "To be, or not to be, that is the question;" and so he surrendered with the best grace he could. He expressed his desire to do his part in maintaining friendly relations between the two countries, and promised at once to send orders to the Captain General of Cuba to release the vessel and that indemnity should be made for losses and damages. Your correspondent at once forwarded a telegram to the HERALD announcing the agreeable news of the success of General Sickles' demand in the matter.

For the benefit of the owners and other parties claiming in the case, I think it important to say that I find in some of the papers of to-day certain paragraphs favorable to the release of the vessel and the consequent indemnity for losses and damages. From one of them I extract the following words.

Somewhere about January last an American steamer, the Lloyd Aspinwall, while en route from Hayti to the United States, was boarded by a Spanish man-of-war and taken to Havana. The commander was detained on board his vessel thirteen days, without being permitted to see the American Consul, and the vessel was declared by the maritime tribunal of Havana to be a lawful prize. As it appears that the vessel was on a legitimate voyage and contained no contraband of war orders have been sent to release the vessel and crew and the government has promised to indemnify losses and damages. This is what a hasty judgment of the tribunal of Havana in a matter of such importance brings us to. We cannot imagine how the said tribunal could so violate an international law—a violation more serious just now, inasmuch as the declaration of belligerent rights in favor of Cuban insurrectionists is being agitated throughout the United States. This right of boarding foreign vessels, exercised by Spanish men of war, may be a powerful argument employed by the United States for recognizing the belligerent rights of the Cubans.

General Sickles deserves great praise for his skill and energy in procuring the release of the steamer and the promise of indemnity.

Now there is the matter of the Criticado, a British vessel, seized several years ago on the high seas by the Spaniards. This vessel was proved an illegal capture by two Spanish tribunals, and was given up to the owners, but they have not been able to get indemnity on account of some flaw in the demand. The Spanish lawyer did not make the claim within a certain number of days after the vessel had been released. That was not the fault of the owner, but of the Spanish lawyer. Nevertheless the British government continued to admit the answers of Spain and allow them to moulder in the archives of the State Department. I am told that Mr. Layard, the new Minister of England, has reopened the case. He will do well to adopt the system of General Sickles, or, as the French, say, "*frapper vite et fort.*"

Two or three good lessons would teach Spanish commanders to "look before they leap" on board and seize foreign vessels without sufficient cause.