

GOMEZ AND PALMA

TALK OF CUBA'S DESTINY

Say Annexation Is the Island's
Natural Fate.

But Cubans for a Little While Want to
Enjoy the Independence They
Fought For—Palma for
President.

For the first time since his arrival in this country ten days ago, Gen. Maximo Gomez last night defined the hopes and opinions of himself and the Cuban people toward the United States. The occasion was that of a dinner given at the Union League Club by W. E. D. Stokes to Gen. Gomez, Gen. T. Estrada Palma, and a number of other prominent Cubans and Cuban sympathizers. In the party were Urbano Gomez, the General's son; John F. Plummer, and James Stokes. During the dinner Gen. Gomez made a speech, which was translated by Señor Gonzales, the private secretary of Governor General Leonard Wood, and after the dinner he went to the library of the club, accompanied by his host and the other diners, and signified his willingness to be interviewed.

The dinner was largely an impromptu affair, Gen. Gomez having intended to leave this city for Cuba yesterday. Upon invitation of Mr. Stokes, formerly prominent as a member of the Cuban League of America, he reconsidered his plans and at 10 o'clock in the morning decided to remain for the dinner. He telegraphed his acceptance, and Mr. Stokes telegraphed to a number of prominent Americans, among them Vice President Roosevelt and Secretary of War Root, inviting them to join in the dinner. The notice proved too short for many of the guests, but the object of getting the General to define his position clearly was accomplished.

The rumor that Gen. Gomez was to be dined in the club traveled quickly, and when he arrived a number of immense bouquets awaited the old soldier.

In his speech following the dinner Gen. Gomez said that he was almost touched to tears by the remarkable reception he has received in the United States. He knew Cuba was indebted to the United States, but he never knew until he came here how deep that debt was and that it was not merely the obligation of one people to another, but of brother to brother.

Every Cuban, born and bred, he said, lived and died with the idea of Cuba Libre before him, with the hope of the people being free and relieved of the yoke of oppression. When an old Cuban died, he said to his son, "You will live to see Cuba free," and the son, maybe, died in the same faith.

Cuba and the United States, he continued, belong together. It is only a question of gravitation when they will be one. But at present, after the great struggle, in which hundreds of thousands of lives were sacrificed, and when men returned to their homes only to find their wives and children starved to death in the restricted barriers in which Weyler held them under his policy of reconcentration, they feel that they must have Cuba libre. It is realized fully that Cuba cannot get along without the United States, but the Cubans do want to feel freedom.

Gen. Gomez referred to Gen. T. Estrada Palma, his old companion in arms, as the hold-over President of Cuba, having been elected during the insurrection of 1868, and he pointed to him as the first President of Cuba libre.

Following the dinner the General went below to be interviewed. He descended on the arm of W. E. D. Stokes and carried a small bunch of deep red carnations and ferns. He seemed deeply affected by the reception which had been accorded him. Asked regarding the Presidential possibilities, he answered:

"There are three men whose names have been connected with this office. Gen. Bartholdi Maso, Gen. T. Estrada Palma, and myself. For my part, I am positively out of the race. I will not accept the nomination under any circumstances. The only logical candidate who remains is Gen. Palma."

"What is the true significance of your visit at this time?" was asked.

"I have been a brother in arms of Gen. Palma during the thirty years' war, and we two had not seen each other since 1894—long before Cuba was free. I wished to see him, and decided that the only way was to look him up if he could not come to see me. Also I wished to pay my respects to your President and to a number of others at the head of your Government to whom I felt, in the name of Cuba, the attention was due. The visit, as I have before said, has no political significance."

Here the General was interrupted by Señor Gonzales, who said:

"The political purpose of the General's visit has been rumored principally because I, being the secretary of Gen. Wood, have accompanied him on the trip. This was done at the request of Gen. Wood himself. He knew that Gen. Gomez and I were old friends, and he suggested that if I wished I might leave my work and accompany the General."

"What is the general feeling of the people of Cuba toward the United States Government? Do they feel assured that all of the promised pledges will be kept without fail?" was asked.

"Absolutely. The feeling among my people is simply one of gratitude; one that is deep rooted and one that will guide all our future relations with this Government in times to come."

The General added that in his opinion the eventual and natural fate of Cuba would be annexation to the United States.

Gen. T. Estrada Palma was then interviewed. He said:

"Once we are free, if the United States will give us but a little economic help in the way of reducing custom duties on our sugar and tobacco, we will grow up in a way that will surprise even the surprise-loving Americans. All we need is a slight surplus to assure our internal prosperity. Two years after the war was over we produced, despite all obstacles, over 600,000 tons of sugar. What, then, can we do under favorable conditions?"

"Your country is our market, and we trust that the Republican Party, which has already given us so much help, will give us this economic assistance. We believe that if the Democratic Party were in power it would do the same."

"What do I believe will be the natural destiny of Cuba? Why, to be a part of the United States, of course. There is no other alternative in the end, but for the present, as the General said, the Cubans want to taste what they have been fighting and dying for just once, even if for a little while—and that is Cuba Libre."

Gen. Gomez and his party will leave for Cuba on Wednesday morning.