

The Sickles Instructions and the Spanish Gunboats.

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Some weeks ago two young men from this country, Wyeth and Speakman, were executed by the Spanish authorities in Cuba, as pirates. Admiral Hoff was at once sent to that part of the island where the execution took place, to investigate and report. His detailed report will not reach here for some days, but the President has received a brief summary of what he learned.

It is pretty clear that neither of these young men intended, when sailing from home, to go to Cuba; and it is as certain as anything can be that at least neither intended joining the insurgent forces of the island. Indeed, the Spanish authorities do not now set up any such claim. The Admiral, it is understood, finds that, in form, they were executed under the provisions of an order of Dulce's since revoked by De Rodas, and, in fact, because the governor of the province feared to resist the demand of the Catalan volunteers for their death. Hoff characterizes the execution as downright murder, and the facts seem to warrant his language.

The Spanish authorities were quite anxious to make what apology and reparation they could. The only thing that can be said in their favor is that the murdered men were both passengers on vessels well known to be in the service of the insurgents; in this fact the Spanish minister here finds some excuse for the course of his people of the island. He has tendered pecuniary reparation to the friends and families of the men, and our government will unquestionably exact something of this nature.

The tenor of the Admiral's report makes it very clear that some weeks ago the volunteer part of the Spanish force was not under good discipline. Subsequent despatches show that Rodas is getting along better with this portion of the army than Dulce did; and the language used by our government to Minister Roberts at the time these executions were announced, probably has had something to do with the change. Further representations of decided character will undoubtedly, by the President's order, be made to the Spanish authorities at an early day.

The Advertiser was advised some time ago by telegraph of the stories in circulation about Gen. Sickles's instructions. I understand the President and cabinet to concur in the opinion that we do not want Cuba, that its annexation at present is not a thing to be desired, and that any strong effort to further a sentiment in favor of union is not advisable. From this conclusion there is not likely to be an immediate departure. Yet, the President and cabinet are for Free Cuba, and doubtless each of them believes the island will at some time, more or less remote, come under our flag. There are two stories about the instructions to Sickles: one that he is to urge such concessions as will give Cuba a government like that of Canada; the other that he is to suggest the sale of Cuba to the Cubans and pledge our government to an endorsement for the whole or a part of the purchase money. Of course there is no way of ascertaining, positively, whether either of these versions is correct.

I discredit the latter entirely. Sickles may be privileged to advise the sale of the island to its inhabitants, but I am satisfied that the President and cabinet have taken no step looking to an endorsement of the Cuban paper. In view of what was said in and out of Congress last spring about the project for endorsing railroad mortgage bonds it is safe enough to conclude that a scheme for endorsing Cuban bonds would not command the support of the country. We are not just now in the market either as purchasers of real estate or backers of real estate paper.

That Sickles is authorized to give the support of the United States to a project for enlarging the liberties of Cuba, there is no doubt whatever. This enlargement might come in two or three ways. Spain could give the island a voice and representation in the Cortes proportionate to its wealth and population—cease to treat it as a dependency, and make it a part of her own sovereignty. She could give it somewhat such a government as England has given Canada—appoint a governor, and allow the people to select his assistants and make their own laws subject to his veto under certain conditions. She could make a time-sale of the island to its inhabitants—allowing them to set aside a yearly portion of the revenues to be paid to the home government, and stipulating to withdraw all officers and troops at the end of a given period. I think events will show that Sickles is to work in the direction indicated by this paragraph. Free Cuba is the President's desire, and there are various methods by which our minister may forward the wishes of the administration.

The Spanish authorities are building twenty gunboats in New York for use in Cuban waters. I think I have warrant for saying that they will never go to sea. Till the Cuban insurgents get a navy of their own, or till some first class power gives them belligerent recognition, it is hard to discover what damage twice twenty Spanish gunboats could do them. Yet, these now building will never go to Cuban waters, unless I am greatly mistaken in the signs of the times. Just how they are to be prevented from going is more than can now be told. A proclamation of belligerency to Cuba would stop them, but the administration does not believe the time has come for that,—perhaps it may never come. We found a way to put the Cuban emissaries on their good behavior—they disregarded our laws, and the execution of these laws broke up their expeditions. We shall find a way for stopping these gunboats; if we do not, set me down as no prophet.

DIXON.