

The Case of the Cuban Privateer.

The Cuba, or Hornet as she was called, has been surrendered to the United States and the Cuban flag hauled down. The United States Marshal boarded her and demanded the surrender. Upon Captain Higgins, of the Cuba, declining to surrender, except to an officer of the United States Navy and under a direct order from the President, Lieutenant Commander Peirson, of the gunboat Frolic, went on board the Cuba and produced the order direct from the President. Captain Higgins gave up his vessel and his sword, and is now a prisoner under the naval authorities. The despatch from Wilmington says the Cuba has been libelled, but we have no details as to the legal proceedings in the case, if there were any, or as to the precise ground on which she was libelled. To libel a vessel is simply to charge her with something against the laws and placing her under the authority of the government libelling her until the case can be tried by the courts in the regular way. But it appears that the flag of the Cuba was hauled down and her captain arrested by an order direct from the President. From this it seems that the Executive has taken the matter out of the hands of the legal authorities. However, the despatch is not clear, and we must wait for further information before forming an opinion in the matter or commenting on the action of the government. The only important fact established is that this Cuban privateer has been seized and is held for a violation of the laws. Whatever may be the legal features of the case hereafter to be developed, or whatever may be the result when a trial takes place, the vessel is prevented from doing any service for the Cubans. While we may condemn the government for its shortsighted policy or timidity with regard to Cuba, we suppose it has acted in this case upon sufficient evidence.

With all our sympathy for the Cubans and wish to see the United States government take a bold and decisive course to secure their independence, we cannot help thinking Captain Higgins and the Cubans have foolishly and prematurely thrown a responsibility upon our government which compels it to act against its wishes in defending its honor and international obligations. We would rather have seen this privateer afloat and doing good service for the Cuban cause; but a great nation like the United States, when forced into such a position, must observe the laws. The Cuban Junta, or agents of the Cuban government here, show little ability. Nor do the crowds of young Cubans in this country show by their acts that ardent patriotism they talk so much about, for instead of losing away their time here they should be fighting for their country. How truly the poet expresses it when he says,
Hereditary bondsmen! know ye not,
Who would be free themselves must strike the blow?

However, these temporary misfortunes may be but as a passing shadow. They may lead the Cubans to renewed energy, and the United States to a more positive policy soon in favor of Cuban independence. Though the Hornet is seized, other vessels with expeditions and supplies are running into Cuban harbors. There is reason to believe the brave Captain Harris, who sailed with the Lillian about the same time the Hornet was at sea, has landed his valuable cargo on the island. The reverses the Cubans may meet with—and great reverses are incident to all such movements—should have the effect only of stimulating them to greater energy and determination.