

THE CUBAN JUNTA OF NEW YORK.

Statement from the Cuban Junta of New York—Why Cespedes' Proclamation of Reprisals Was Issued—Interesting Facts and Extracts.

The following explains itself:—

ROOMS OF THE CUBAN REPUBLICAN JUNTA, }
NEW YORK, May 24, 1869. }

Among the telegraphic news published on Saturday, the 22d inst., there is a despatch from Havana containing extracts from a decree issued by General Cespedes on the 18th of February, and in which several rigid resolutions are proclaimed by the Cuban leader. The Spanish authorities, by publishing those extracts now, evidently desire to counteract the feeling of horror occasioned by Valmaseda's infamous proclamation of the 4th of April, the latter being made to appear as a necessary and excusable consequence of the former. With that object the Cespatch only mentions the orders contained in Cespedes' edict, and artfully avoids making any allusions to the circumstances which gave rise to them and which are expressed in the proclamation. The Junta therefore consider it their duty to make a truthful statement of the matter, thereby unmasking the artifice employed by the Spanish government with the object of disguising its iniquitous conduct at the cost of Cuban reputation and honor. General Cespedes' decree of the 18th of February is now brought to life by the authorities at Havana, who perversely inform us that it was issued five weeks before that of Valmasada; but the former proclamation, far from having given occasion to the promulgation of the latter, was precisely the sad and inevitable consequence of the system of war to the knife declared against Cuban patriots by the Spanish commander. The following is a complete text of Cespede's declaration:—

Since the first acts of the Cuban revolution, since the taking of Bayamo and Tiguani in this department, and Guaimaro in the central department, when a generous capitulation was offered to the garrisons, on which we could have enforced an unconditional surrender, as is well known, the principles of humanity, civilization and generosity were displayed on the part of the Cubans, showing the manner in which we were willing to carry on war with our oppressors. More than four hundred prisoners, whom these successes and following ones placed in our power without any risk of life, have continued to reveal our purpose, while the enemy violates in a base manner at Puerto Principe the capitulation of Guaimaro, arming anew against us the civil guard, who had been sworn by the terms of the above named capitulation never to take up arms against the Cubans. And they not only denied quarter to the few prisoners they succeeded in taking, but with bloodthirstiness and ferocity worthy of their antecedents in America where they lost their power by similar brutalities and cruelty, they shot, without judgment, peaceable citizens for mere suspicion of connivance with the revolutionary troops. They did more. While our troops not only respected the mortal remains of the enemy's soldiers and buried those who were inhumanly abandoned by their companions, and took care of their wounded, our dead were barbarously abused by the Spanish soldiery, their bodies mutilated and otherwise subjected to the most horrible atrocities.

The liberating army has not made reprisals. We wish to avail ourselves of every means in our power to make the enemy adopt more humane practices and a less ferocious system of warfare. With that object I had addressed, in the first days of the revolution, a despatch in that sense to the Spanish Governor at Manzanillo. That despatch obtained no answer, and the shooting of Cubans found in arms and the desecration of our dead were continued by the Spaniards. Decided, nevertheless, to await the last extremity before giving way to the horrors of reprisals, I sent by flag of truce a despatch on the 20th of December last to the Commander General of Cuba, in which I entreated that the Spanish government should accept the kind of warfare which we had instituted and were observing. In other words, to stipulate quarter for prisoners and wounded, as all civilized belligerents do, even when not united by ties of similarity in origin, religion and language, and naming a period of fifteen days for its answer, declaring that after that time, if I unhappily received no satisfactory answer saying that they would cease to shoot and commit the before named cruelties, I would adopt at last the mournful, but absolute, necessity of reprisal.

The commanding general, Brigadier Garcia Munoz, after having maltreated by words and miserably insulted the envoy, by bearing with his own hands the insignia and devices of the defenders of the country, said in answer that he could not condescend to take my despatch into consideration. Notwithstanding, true to my word, I resolved to take no steps whatever until the period should have elapsed. But to-day the permit being at an end, and the conduct of the enemy being unchanged—but on the contrary, aggravated by new acts of cruelty and barbarity—I have been obliged to accept the war to the knife with all the determination with which I have repelled it.

Therefore I decree reprisal against the enemy in its most ample terms from to-day, without restriction of any kind. Blood for blood, execution for execution, extermination for extermination. CARLOS MANUEL DE CESPEDES.

JANUARY, 1869.

The decree issued on the 18th of February was the sequel and practical expression of the above declaration, and as a proof of this statement we give the heading which accompanied the proclamation, and which was very carefully suppressed by the Spanish censor:—

War to the knife being declared in the Island of Cuba by the Spanish authorities in several edicts, executed in deed by their troops operating in this territory, and reprisals being admitted as a rule of their warfare, I, Captain General Cespedes, am obliged to dictate the necessary course to be followed on our part to avoid confusion and to attain uniformity of action in the army under my command.

Whereas all who are waging war against us are not similarly circumstanced;

Whereas, according to the laws of humanity and the elementary principles of sound policy, a distinction should be established among our enemies, and

Whereas, it is in accordance with the spirit and nature of the present war of independence, I decree

[Here follow the resolutions, of which an extract has been already published in the cable despatch to which we refer.]

With the above explanations the trickery of the Spanish government will be made manifest, as they clearly prove not only that Valmaseda's proclamation of the 4th of April had no connection whatever with Cespedes' decree of the 18th of February; but also that the latter was adopted in consequence of similar proclamations issued by the Spaniards and the acts of cruelty and barbarity perpetrated by their soldiery. Nevertheless, let Cespedes' proclamation be compared with that of Valmaseda's, and it will be seen at once that the same judgment is not applicable to both, even if considered in the abstract. Cespedes establishes a difference between his enemies—grants pardon to the Spanish soldier and punishes neutral Cubans, according to circumstances. Valmaseda orders that young men over fifteen years of age shall be shot for the simple crime of being away from their homes without a plausible excuse; that all dwellings uninhabited or unprotected with a white flag shall be reduced to ashes; and, finally, that all women who are not found in their respective houses or in those of their relations shall be taken by force to Jiguani or Bayamo. The Cuban leader, in obedience to the principles of civilization, when driven to retaliate in consequence of the atrocious acts of his enemy, endeavors not to be absolute in his severity; the Spanish Chief-tain vents his fury not only upon those who resist him with arms, but also upon peaceable inhabitants, children, women and even farm houses.

Let truth, therefore, come to our aid, and place facts in their right place. Valmaseda's proclamation admits of no excuse, and will stand forever as a testimony of Spanish ignorance in the island of Cuba.

P. J. BASORA, Secretary.