

The New Governor for Cuba and the Status of the War—A Question for the Administration

Within the next three days the newly-appointed Captain General of Cuba will probably arrive at Havana. The personal character and impulses of a commander-in-chief always impress themselves on his forces and generally give a tone to the contest in which he is engaged. This, we doubt not, will be the case with the present new comer to America, and as the question in which he is to be engaged is an American one it becomes us to examine the new elements he brings to the field. The field itself presents a double question—that of the freedom of Cuba proclaimed by the patriots, and the less direct issue brought forward by the Havana volunteers in deposing the authorities sent from the mother country and demanding the installation of a new order of things in the remnant of Spanish rule.

General Caballero de Rodas is not an unknown soldier. His course in 1854, during some temporary disturbances in the peninsula, and more recently in the democratic disturbances at Malaga and Cadiz, gained for him the epithet of "the butcher" from the popular voice, and it is said he likes the nickname. He is in the prime of life and physical energy, well skilled in his profession, and bears the reputation of being remorseless, cruel and vindictive. In civil life he has had no experience, and comes for the first time to administer a government around which gather many of the highest questions of international law and domestic policy. With these qualities we believe he will exactly suit the volunteers of Havana, and therefore anticipate that he will have no trouble from them on his arrival in Cuba. What effect on the military situation his advent will produce will probably depend as much on the question of resources as on that of personal qualities. On the character of the war now going on in that island we think his coming will produce a marked effect, and one that is worthy of every man's consideration.

The war in Cuba is being carried on by the Spaniards in a most relentless spirit. The wounded are slaughtered as they lie on the field, and all prisoners are reported to have been shot while attempting to escape. Spanish authorities claim that the patriots pursue the same practices, but recent advices from the field prove this not to be so. The crime of General Dulce in the eyes of the volunteers was that he was too merciful to traitors, and in their view every man is a traitor who is born in Cuba. We may therefore believe that the coming of General Rodas will not add humanity to the struggle, and herein there is a point which nearly affects our own government. The events of every day are proving that our citizens are taking part in the war, in which the great principles involved address themselves to the American heart; and the great question forces itself upon the administration, In what light shall they be held, and what attitude will be assumed towards them by us?

Claiming as we do that the war is a just war, we hold that every American citizen has the right individually to expatriate himself and take a part in it. In so doing he accepts the wage of battle and the laws of war, and must abide by the result. Victory or death are free alike to come to him upon the battle field. His former government cannot interfere after he has left our shores to protect or shield him from them. But there is a duty which our government should perform; a step which it should take, and that is, it should see that the laws of war are respected and that the practices of the victor do not go beyond those justified by humanity. If Spain insists upon murdering the wounded, shooting prisoners and executing those who voluntarily surrender themselves, she places herself beyond the pale of civilized nations and merits the execration of the world. Let the government at Washington look to this, for the issue is coming upon them.