

The Filibusters, the Neutrality Laws and the Position of the Government.

From the tenor of the daily news reports of arrests of persons by the United States Marshals for violating the neutrality laws, of the departure of steamers from our various ports with men, arms and munitions of war, or prepared to take on armament of a war character, and of the landing of expeditions in Cuba to assist the patriots, it is evident to all that movements of a very active kind are on foot among the private war circles, and great anxiety is entertained in many quarters to know what position the government at Washington will take in view of the events which are looming up around us. We are daily in receipt of letters asking for further information on these subjects, from persons who are not satisfied to know the development of events as it transpires from day to day, and who evidently belong to that class of readers who wish to know what is going to happen. To these we have only to say that, so far as regards the government at Washington, its members are evidently more in the dark and more puzzled than anybody else as to what they are going to do and what position they will find themselves to hold towards any coming event. Without a political chart or the guiding needle of a policy they will continue to drift on in the eddy of events, accepting the results that may accrue. On other points a general review of affairs will present many points of interest.

The principal islands of the West Indian Archipelago are to-day in a crisis of great political changes, the incipient point of which lies in the abolition of African slavery by the United States. Cuba is undergoing an armed revolution, with emancipation and annexation inscribed upon its banner; the Dominican republic is agitated with the proposition of a peaceful admission to the American Union; Hayti is divided into three hostile camps, in one of which at least the idea of an American protectorate is entertained; and Porto Rico is reported to have caught the fire in a way which greatly alarms the colonial officers of the Spanish monarchy. The various parties involved in all these movements have their active partisans in this country who are engaged in pushing their respective views in every feasible way. The co-operation of the press is assiduously sought; diplomatic and extra diplomatic communications are pressed upon the government and the people; arms and munitions of war are pushed forward through every possible channel; steamers are being built, chartered or purchased and prepared for naval armament in behalf of several of the combatants, and parties of the enterprising and adventurous among our population are being sent off to the various exciting scenes of events.

So numerous are these operations, and so conflicting is the information in regard to them which is laid before the administration that the government thus far, with the best disposition to preserve the majesty of the laws, has not been able to convict or even detain any of the many enterprises that have been denounced to it as infringing the neutrality act. The Quaker City steamer was detained and released in this city; another steamer was denounced in Boston and escaped; several are reported to have departed from Southern ports without suspicion; others are rumored to have left New York recently without the knowledge of the officials, and finally several members of a Cuban junta known to exist here have been indicted for supposed participation in the sending of an armed expedition which undoubtedly landed in Cuba. In these operations we are able to trace to a greater or less extent the agents of Cespedes and Dulce in Cuba, Baez and Cabral in St. Domingo, and Salnave and Domingue in Hayti. These names respectively represent existing and revolutionary powers in each of the islands named.

The existing governments appeal, of course, to the administration at Washington to enforce the neutrality laws, and the revolutionary agents, with equal pertinacity and perhaps greater skill, claim to avoid their provisions. Among the filibuster elements here there has always been present a large number of astute, keen and audacious men who have ever found it feasible to carry out their projects without coming in conflict with the law, particularly when public opinion has been favorable to their designs, and hence since the passage of the present neutrality act in 1818 we believe no conviction has been obtained under it. In fact, the law assumes too much to be effective, and the popular sympathy is most generally opposed to the party that appeals to its exercise in their behalf. We do not hesitate, therefore, to believe that the government will fail in all its attempts to enforce it in the future, as it has done in the past in the well known cases of the Cuban filibusters under Lopez and Walker and the Fenian filibuster operations against Canada.

From these premises it will readily be seen that the movements now going on in the West India islands will continue to receive assistance from this country, in proportion as their purposes merit the sympathy of the people; and that the government is powerless to prevent it further than causing personal annoyance to some few individuals or a short period of delay to some departing ship. The changes which are transpiring in the islands south of us result from causes in which the American government has no part and operate through channels which are beyond its control. An enlarged and wise policy on its part might exercise great influence in shaping coming events, but no policy it can devise could prevent their development. Whatever exists there of an old and effete character, such as colonial governments, African slavery, imitations of European forms, a trammelled press and ignorant and degraded peoples, will disappear with the march of American ideas and the increase of American intercourse with them. The events which we are witnessing to-day in our midst are merely portions of an inevitable development whose final realization is simply a question of the duration of the physical and pecuniary resources of the Powers opposed to the new ideas.