

SPAIN AND CUBA.

Views of the Secretary of State on the Subject—A Talk Between the Secretary and Mr. Roberts—The Seizure of the Spanish Armada—A Complicated Question of International Obligations—Diplomatic Argument and Sound Doctrine.

WASHINGTON, N. Y., August 7, 1890.

Impatience is a quality most largely developed in American character. It is exemplified in every department of industry and enterprise, and enters particularly into the execution of measures which the public mind by a sort of intuition has invested with its own judgment of right. During the late war we saw this peculiarity strongly exhibited, and not always in the spirit of toleration or discretion. The success of military operations was frequently impaired and often entirely frustrated by the popular clamor for action. There is a certain logic of events which must be reasoned out the same in effect as in the development of an argument. This clamorous spirit, never satisfied with the steady progress of affairs, has now fastened itself upon questions of public administration, and assumes to prescribe the time and manner of carrying out a governmental policy, without waiting to see it naturally unfold itself by the regular degrees of development to meet as they come along the emergencies for which such policy was designed.

We have an instance of this state of the popular mind on the question of Cuba and Spain, and after all that has been said on the subject the administration understands perfectly its duty and responsibility and is determined not to be swerved from it. The public, with their usual impatience, have had a great deal to say in criticism in regard to the measures which were inaugurated towards the patriots of Cuba, and in the observance of which the government designed nothing more than the fulfillment of its international obligations of neutrality towards a nation with which it had friendly relations, even if it did not feel a sympathy. The outbreak in Cuba was another instance of the moral influence established by the United States. Spanish misrule and oppression in St. Domingo resulted in the overthrow of the Castilian supremacy there, and the same has been the case with nearly all the Spanish colonies on this hemisphere. The action of Cuba was nothing more, in assuming an attitude of rebellion, than following in the steps of Spain's other colonies, and the American people naturally sympathized with the patriots and displayed that sympathy in expressions of popular good will and the hope that Cuba might be free. The people even went further, and gave material assistance in men and money and other means of prosecuting the dispossession of Spain in the domain of an extensive, fertile and valuable island, rich in physical resources, and at the same time by geographical position controlling that inland sea, the Gulf of Mexico, washing a thousand miles of United States territory, from Florida to the Rio Grande.

In the popular sympathy the people only acted as all their instincts prompted them, and in this the government, and I can say the President and all his Cabinet ministers, were in hearty concordance. But while the people were responsible for nothing the government was held bound by every law regulating the amicable relations between nations at peace, and could not, without a gross violation of these obligations, act otherwise than observe a rigid neutrality towards both the recognized belligerent attitude of Spain and the hostile forces of Cuba.

The state of things was perfectly plain to the Secretary of State, Mr. Fish; but, as the head of the administration, he had a higher obligation than mere personal feeling and sympathy. In his official capacity he was compelled to observe the question from an international standpoint, and in doing so was involved the honor, integrity and reputation of the administration and the country. In preserving these he was as much responsible as the President himself, for it was with him directly to put in force the policy of the President as the head of the nation. The question was frequently before the Cabinet and discussed in all its bearings; the President expressed his views, the Cabinet ministers expressed theirs, and there was a unanimity of sympathy difficult to overcome in inaugurating and enforcing a discreet and honest national policy. To violate our international obligations, thus involving the country in a war, would have been a step of doubtful sagacity or statesmanship, and it is not clear that the reputation of the country abroad would have been much benefited. The policy of the government was therefore directed in the channel of non-intervention in the struggle as regarded either side, and that has and will be the policy until the provisional government of the patriots of Cuba manifest signs of a national existence. At present the struggle on the part of the patriots is confined to the mountain sections of the interior, and, although their operations give continued evidences of increasing strength, they are not in an attitude of a regular governmental establishment. The Spanish forces have been driven to the coast towns. The last of the interior cities, Puerto Principe, is closely invested. Let this place fall and Nuevitas is open to the patriots. They will then have an ocean port and will then be able to hold intercourse with the outer world; have a harbor for their ships and be able to send their flag and regularly accredited representatives to nations in sympathy with their cause. This will constitute the first step, and there is little doubt will meet with a suitable response. In the inception of the struggle Mr. Fish took hold of the question, and strong as were his personal feelings in favor of Cuba he felt his equal obligation as a high officer of the government towards Spain. Upon the arrival of Mr. Lopez Roberts at Washington as the accredited representative of the indefatigable government of Spain that gentleman called at once upon the Secretary of State, and a lengthy interview was had covering the whole question of Spain and Cuba. Mr. Roberts made various propositions, and in his enthusiasm asked some things unnecessary and even beyond what might be expected of a strong and independent nation.

Mr. Fish responded that the United States government had already made up its mind what course it would pursue in the struggle, and that it should continue to preserve a strict neutrality. That he must understand that both the government and the people of the United States were in sympathy with the movement of the people of Cuba; that the government in the face of this and against its personal feelings had taken a stand which it would sustain, and it would preserve towards Spain the same rule as it would towards Cuba; that the United States would not interfere in the contest, except that the harbors and rivers of the United States should not be used in which to fit out hostile expeditions, and that measures would be taken to stop all such violations of the neutrality laws. The secretary plainly told Mr. Roberts that the tendency of all the islands and countries lying adjacent to the United States was towards a unification with our system and whatever might be the result of the present struggle Cuba, for instance, would sooner or later come under the authority and constitute part of the government of the United States; that he did not think this was to be accomplished in a day or in a year, but the result was inevitable; that the time would come when the United States would find it to its interest and security to take possession of these countries if necessary and organize them into permanent communities under a secure form of government and surrounded by republican institutions. At such time as the convenience of the United States dictated this policy would be enforced. At present, however, the government proposed to adhere to its neutrality.

Although the Spanish Minister did not fail to take the suggestion from the Secretary that the United States was then acting in the interests of Spain and against its own sympathies, which might some time take a turn, it appears he inaugurated himself a violation of that very neutrality which he exacted from the United States government in repressing all efforts on the part of certain individuals to send aid to Cuba. Though the government was perfectly cognizant of the building of a fleet of gunboats in American waters, it had no official knowledge of the fact nor the uses to which it was to be put until recently. When official inquiry was made as to the future employment of these vessels, which it was known were not for the United States service, it was first learned as an official fact that they were being constructed under contracts between the builders and the Spanish government, through their representatives. The Spanish Minister had asked neutrality and he had received it. He responded to this act of kindness towards Spain by attempting to fit out a fleet in American waters.

Mr. Fish sent for Mr. Roberts, who failed to appear. Thinking he might be out of town he sent again, but once more the diplomatic Castilian kept clear. It was very evident Mr. Roberts was very much in the condition of the person who had nothing to say on a certain occasion. On last Friday, a week past, the Secretary, being about to leave Washington in company with the President for New York, turned the matter over to the Assistant Secretary of State, J. C. Bancroft Davis, with instructions to see the Spanish Minister. It does not appear, however, that he saw the Assistant Secretary either. He left Washington for New York, and, arriving during the presence of the President in the city on a day's sojourn after his visit to Long Branch, it was supposed that the representative of the confused state of affairs in Spain was about to lay his own confusion before the President, but he never went near the President. At the same time he was within two hours' ride by rail, or within about the same time by boat, which latter method might have proved a refreshing opportunity of visiting the Secretary of State at his elegant home at Glenclyn. Here, surrounded by the beauties of Highland scenery, under the shadow of old Fort Putnam in full view of West Point, under the influence of other associations of a historic and military nature, and not to omit the genial hospitality which would doubtless have received him as the hands of the Secretary himself, the whole question might have been thoroughly talked over, and it might have been arranged, in consideration of an attempted violation of the neutrality laws of the United States, that the said government would confiscate and take possession of the fleet in question. But no Spanish Minister made his appearance.

The question involved in the arrest, as it is considered by the government, of the Spanish armada, is a very plain one. The Secretary of State determined to maintain a neutral position. In doing so he detained expeditions fitting out for Cuba, and in many instances, at the request of the Spanish Minister, delayed the sailing of vessels engaged in legitimate trade, as it was afterwards proven. Now the other side of the question begins to operate. Spain

undertakes to build a fleet of boats in American yards. Spain is recognized as a government, and under ordinary circumstances might be permitted to go on with her work. But there happens to be, as the Secretary of State aptly terms it, a dormant war between Spain and Peru. Now Peru and the United States are as good friends as Spain and the United States, and probably more so. So if the United States prevents Cuban filibusters from leaving her harbors because Spain and the United States are at peace, the same rule acts equally well in favor of Peru and against Spain, because Peru and the United States are the best of friends. It was a piece of extreme and expensive shortsightedness on the part of Spain to overlook this thing, or it is trifling with the dignity of the United States to annoy the Secretary of State with protestations against almost every vessel that clears for Southern waters for fear that it might be used against that "Ever Faithful (f) lale," and then, under the very nose of the authorities, attempt to do the same thing herself against Peru.

The Secretary of State is too wise for such strategy. Possessing all that equanimity of mind and temper necessary in a diplomat and a statesman, he observed sagaciously and carefully, and acts prudently and at the timely moment. He well observed to your correspondent:—"The government had its obligations to perform towards Peru as well as towards Spain. Some months since the Peruvian government purchased from this government two monitors. The Spanish Minister protested, on the ground that these vessels might be used in aid of the Cubans should they ask them. The Spanish Minister recognized the continued existence of a state of war between his own government and that of Peru. Subsequently the Peruvian monitors were permitted to leave, having entered into an agreement with the United States that those vessels should not be used against any Power with which the United States was at peace until they should have anchored in Peruvian waters. According to the last accounts I have received in regard to these vessels, and I watch them closely," continued the Secretary, emphatically, "they were at Rio Janeiro making all possible haste for their own waters. Now, these Peruvian monitors were allowed to sail on this agreement, and in addition had the written statement of the Spanish Minister that he was satisfied that the fleet should be allowed to go."

Growing still more earnest, the Secretary continued:—"If the Peruvian government had played false I would have sent a fleet after the vessels and brought them back or destroyed them. Now, here is the case of Spain. Between Peru and Spain, as I have said, there now exists a war in a dormant state; but how soon it may become flagrant I cannot say. It is probable very soon. The recognition by Peru of belligerent rights on the part of the uprising people of Cuba is likely to open the war anew. The war then becomes flagrant, Peru entered into an agreement not to use her fleet purchased here until it had anchored in Peruvian waters. The case is stronger in the instance of Spain. Spain is building thirty gunboats. Those gunboats will be sent to Cuba, and will form a floating wall of defence around the island. These thirty gunboats will relieve the forty-two war vessels, for that is all they have for the coastguard duty. The next thing we would hear would be this whole fleet bombarding the ports of Peru, proving upon her commerce and preventing trade. All this towards a country at peace with the United States, and all on account of the thirty gunboats built in our waters." Continued the Secretary, "I do not expect to take command of the Spanish navy, and direct what shall be its operations. I have enough to do at home. But I do not propose to let those thirty gunboats leave; and if they do leave, except with authority, I will send after them a force which may be somewhat surprising."

It was quite evident in the Secretary's manner that he sees the question assuming a tangible shape. Spain has her hands full, and if she cannot reft and reinforce her fleets with vessels built in the United States she cannot do it as well or as economically elsewhere. In confining her to the strict neutrality which the United States has and will for the present observe, she will not gain strength. It is not the intention of the government to interfere with Spain, but it will enforce its neutrality. The Secretary is thoroughly American in his ideas of policy, and, while he does not wish to violate any of our national obligations, it is certain he will not lose a chance of glorifying his country and his administration by adding to its possessions where prudent. As he told the Spanish Minister, "all these countries will belong to us sooner or later" is the theory of his policy, and we may expect, under the auspices of this true American doctrine, the accomplishment of wonderful results.

It will be remembered that the settlement of the war between Spain and Peru was left to the arbitration of the United States. The Secretary of State proposes to have the matter taken up during the coming winter, and will appoint a time either in December or January when the question shall be properly adjusted, provided the parties do not withdraw in the meantime.