

THE REVOLUTION IN CUBA. THE ELECTORAL QUESTION. FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.

HAVANA, Feb. 3.—We are now looking ahead to the elections so tardily, and, even now, indefinitely proscribed by the Government of Serrano and Prim. They are to be an element of change, whether it reflect or progress, or be for peace or war. A good part of the Creoles have said, through their papers, that they value not a particle the poor franchise offered them; that they have been blinded and cheated before by such an offer; that they will not be tricked into subscribing to a Spanish result; that they will not vote. If this purpose is to be fulfilled, then may Cuba, should the electoral law have its way, be counted as close a province of Spain as Andalusia. In other words, Spaniards and Spanish influence, in the interest of those who hold Spain for the monarchy's sake, will carry the elections to a dead certainty. Thus they are apparently bound to do in any event, since the law of elections, already analyzed in this correspondence, is a provision for that end. The Cubans have contemplated a silent secession from affairs as a decent act under the circumstances. They profess to feel at last that they themselves are Cuba, and no made and contrived majority on the side of the Spanish retrogression can overtop that native fact. If they do vote it is feared that the issue will be all the same as if they do not; and that in any case Cuba will be effectively misrepresented in the Cortes of Spain. Back of all this apprehension is a general objection to Spain, grounded upon long alienation, and fortified by the Cuban individuality. The law in question is a poor law with a mean preamble—so Americans would judge it; but I suppose it must be regarded as a kind of progress. It provides for elections where elections never were before in any rational sense; but it rather provides for, or gives room to, unfair elections, while offering an extremely narrow opportunity to make those elections fairer. The law was worthy of the Government which, in the hey-day of its vitality, and with all non-slaveholding Spain at its back, dare not decree in any form, did not utter a brave word to that effect, did not manifest a full and hearty resolve to that end—the emancipation of Cuba. I do not pretend to say that the Minister of Foreign Affairs received a consideration from the Slave Board of Madrid to quash his just and statesmanlike qualms respecting an institution which, as long as it exists on Cuban soil, is a black commentary on the character of Spanish liberties and aspirations. But the Minister might as well have realized the common gossip as to be spokesman for all the shortcomings and now suspected untrustworthiness of the Provisional Government with regard to the affairs of the Ever Faithful Island. It is not what the Spanish Government has done, for that is little, which seems so much at fault; but it is its general omission and apparently unlimited conservatism, of which nothing is positively promised, and from which nothing can be distinctly hoped or predicted.

Months after late the Spanish revolution has reached Cuba. The electoral law is its fruit. Spain has voted at large, but it is not known when Cuba will have her actual franchise, such as it is. It was, as well, no doubt, to have afforded Cuba the practice of her right some time ago as now; but it was assuredly convenient for the Provisional Government in Spain to have escaped any considerable number of Liberal votes from the island. Besides, another machinery was thought to be required for Cuba than that of the universal suffrage granted to Spain. The island is slaveholding, hence the pretext of restricting its franchise. Every 25,000 inhabitants in Spain were allowed a representative, but in Cuba, counting all her inhabitants, only one deputy is given to every 100,000 inhabitants. Omitting the blacks and coolies, the apportionment is still but one to 50,000. In Spain the suffrage was free, without any tax qualification; in Cuba it is limited by the provision that the voter, unless he belongs to a profession, shall have paid the very large sum of \$25 in taxes. It is not sufficient that father or mother, who may be wealthy, shall have paid this sum for their household; the son who desires to vote must have paid the tax also. The Cuban elections are to be practically managed by men who are looked upon as half-enemies at least, that is to say, by Spaniards willing to fulfill any demand of the Government. They are to take place in circumscriptions and districts, but it is so provided by the imposition of the Spanish law that no district shall have its own representative or its own will. To explain: Havana and Pinar del Rio constitute the limits of one circumscription, but the entire number of six or seven deputies to be chosen from this large section will be nominated by the great majority of electors in Havana, and, of course, will be elected by them. Pinar del Rio and the towns and villages dependent thereupon, and having less population than the Havana neighborhood, may vote as they please, but the result will be the same. In the particular described the law seems to have been made ingeniously for the purpose of aiding the ascendancy of the Spanish Government influence at the elections, and suppressing, as far as possible, the representation of the interior Creole district. With so many disadvantages, it would be preposterous to say that the law just given to Cuba is a fair law. But, in one respect, that of not permitting the common soldier to vote—and this was an exception made in simple decency, and with wise regard to a crisis—does it give the Cubans a chance. The apportionment, the circumscription, the registration, the tax qualification, are all features of wrong in the constitution of the law. Compared with the suffrage granted the people of Spain, it seems monstrously unjust. It does not even guarantee what Gen. Dulce has recently announced through the official organ as part of his political creed—that Cuba shall have the same rights as any other province of Spain, and no more.

The order issued by the Captain-General pursuant to the publication of the law of election, explain its spirit and intent as well as any Spanish authority may. Something, however, remains vague, after all that is said; but perhaps this vagueness must be accepted as a kind of explanation in itself—as, for instance, that the governing people hereabout and in the mother country do not wish to mean too much while they are doing so little, and yet wish to mean everything. The Governor's recent circular against the refractory press, leaves very little or no liberty that can be considered as distinctly Cuban to be indulged in before the advent of the franchise; for it says that "all words against the dignity of the nation, all phrases directly or indirectly against the integrity of the national territory, all articles and paragraphs which tend to favor the cause of the insurrection," shall be considered punishable offenses. This instruction, interpreted by a hostile functionary, would leave hardly anything for an honest press to say upon the Cuban side of affairs, and if not redeemably vague, must be held as a literal suppression of a half-liberty of the press, which there was no sincere intention of granting for any length of time, in the first place. The circular in definition of the law of reunion is in proper following to the one just criticized. It is a roundabout and rather mannered composition, which requires no other work than its style to show that it comes from a loyal school of Spanish gentlemen—a body of men sometimes admirable, loyal even to the fingers and toes, and as true to a dead principle as to a live one. Here is this latest circular, especially directed to reunions in view of elections:

Being duly published in the Official Gazette of the 29th the decree in which the Provisional Government of the Nation prescribes the mode and rules by which are to be elected the Deputies of the Province of Cuba who will represent it in the Constituent Assembly. I have now to present to you the principles which it is necessary to maintain with respect to the Liberty of Reunion which has been conceded to the natives of this Province, as already I have done with regard to the Press, and in accord with the instructions which I have received from the Provisional Government. First in its purpose to restore the honor and the liberty of Spain, the generous idea of the uprising of September, it adjusts its resolve to secure

the possession of these sacred objects, inspiring them with the councils of reflection and experience. The Superior Political Government, being animated with the same thought, will indicate to you the principles which it has to present, now that the people of this Province have to commence to make use of the right of public meeting, which is conceded them as an integral part of the exercise of the electoral right. Above all things, it is needful to make it understood that the Government does not alter its determination, already manifested, not to resolve any of the capital questions which constitute the mode of political existence, social and administrative, of this province, without the convention of its representatives in the Cortes.

In order to agree upon the means of assuring the greater certainty in the elections, the municipal elections as well as those of the Deputies of the Cortes, must have the right of reunion.

The liberty of suffrage must be respected by all, and to this end principally is directed the dispositions of this circular, in order that the practice of the rights conceded to these native citizens corresponds to the noble intent of the Government of the Nation.

The integrity of the territory, never and among no people discussed, and slavery, absolute basis of the agricultural and industrial property of this province, cannot and ought not to enter into public debate. You will not permit the least discussion upon these fundamental questions on the pretext of electoral union.

The agitation of the minds and passions of a people inexperienced in the use of political rights, counsels the greatest care in this measure of prohibition.

The Government, which will in good time propose the legal and humanitarian solution of the difficult problem of slavery, cannot consent that the present hour shall be converted into an occasion of well founded fears and alarms. Spain unreservedly tenders her arms to her brothers of this distant province, and is disposed to make all sacrifices in order to remove whatever perils menace Cuba by means of perfidy or the bad counsel of any of her deluded children. Now near the total end of an unjustifiable insurrection, it will be without doubt more than imprudent, a crime of treason to pronounce against the country in circumstances so critical. Without fear that the always-loyal children of the province will incur any of the offenses described in their discussions of public affairs, I have still to ask you to take precautionary measures in order that their perpetration may be impossible, commencing with the publication of the terms of this circular. Let it be understood by the various Governments that the Cortes and the Government await the aid of the Spanish deputies from the province in order to enlarge and confirm the liberties which are conceded to-day, upon the prudent use of which depends the realization of the desires of all good Spaniards, additionally to the opportune means which you believe it necessary to adopt from the terms of this circular, you will instruct the public that, in order to use the right of reunion before the elections, it will be necessary for those who desire its use to make known to the authorities their wish, manifesting the object of the reunion, the place, day, and hour designated, and the circumstances of those who solicit it. Preserve by every means in their right those who make legal use of the reunion, and be inexorable in preventing those who, with that pretext, alter the public order, consigning to the tribunals those who, wanting in patriotism, are guilty of the offenses pointed out in this circular. God guard you many years.

Havana, Jan. 20, 1869.

DOMINGO DULCE.

How the Captain-General conceives that there is not the slightest danger to be apprehended from the always faithful children of the Isle, yet plainly declares that he is providing for a crisis, is not to be easily made out, but is a problem to be set down among the standard mysteries of old-fashioned policy. According to various orders of the Captain-Generalship, neither Slavery, nor Religion, nor Territory, are to enter into debate; and hence is all discussion, except as to candidates who can declare themselves but privately, and then only in the interest of the few, cut off summarily. I take the latest circular for witness that there is no free speech in Cuba that is worth a song to the Cubans. I suspect from the same document that there is no earnest, honest intention on the part of Government to adopt anything like a speedy emancipation. I believe that the election in Cuba is more or less a foreordained sham. There is much meaning in the provision that those who wish to hold reunions must solicit the authorities and make known their circumstances, if this provision is to cover Cubans suspected of disloyalty. The general effect of the law and the pursuant circulars is to direct the power and privilege which go to the holding of the elections to the hands of the loyal or Spanish side of the argument, for I hardly think that many of the Cubans can be considered loyal in the Spanish sense.

The municipal elections, say the friends of the Government, are soon to be held throughout the island, preparatory to which the registration of electors have been taking place for eight days, from the 28th or 29th of January. The time was most inopportune for the Cubans, as they had not recovered from the inevitable disgust and disheartenment consequent upon the previous assassinations in the city. But it cannot be known when the elections will take place. That is a matter rather dependent upon the condition and disposition of the army of Cespedes. The Captain-General declares that the insurrection will very soon come to an end. But I observe that an unusual military activity exists in the City of Villa Clara, by very many leagues nearer the Capital than Puerto Principe, and that all citizens capable of bearing arms have been directed to register for military duty.