

OUR RELATIONS WITH CUBA

Natives Appear to Have Forgotten Terms of Gen. Wood's Call.

First Duty of Constitutional Convention at Havana Was to Make Agreement with This Country.

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 7.—The Administration assumes, in discussing the Cuban Constitution and the conditions for its adoption by this Government, that the Cubans have not forgotten that there were responsibilities and obligations to be observed by them before the United States could be expected to regard with satisfaction and a sense of security the Cuban willingness to become a free and independent government. If this assumption is a mistaken one, and the Cubans in their assembly have blundered into supposing that the adoption of a Constitution and the call for an election under it would be the only formalities to be observed between Cuba and the United States, it will become necessary to recall to the Constitution makers some of the conditions that the President has not lost sight of, but which the Cubans in their zeal or error have apparently overlooked.

When the pacification of Cuba had proceeded to a point that Gen. Leonard Wood considered complete enough to justify the President in offering to the Cubans the opportunity, under military rule, to round out that pacification by providing the organization of a government so as to comply with the spirit and letter of the resolution adopted in April, 1898, the purpose of the Administration was made known by a proclamation, issued by order of the President from Gen. Wood's office in Havana. This proclamation recited the success of the Cubans in establishing municipal governments, suggested the readiness of the people for a general government, and ordered an election of delegates to a constitutional convention to be held in September, 1900, the convention to meet in Havana in November. But there was a condition broader than that of simply complying with the order for the election of delegates. This convention was to frame a constitution, but "as a part thereof to provide for and agree with the Government of the United States upon the relations to exist between that Government and the government of Cuba." After that, in the order of statement, the Constitution was "to provide for the election of the people of officers under the Constitution, and the transfer of government to the officers so elected."

Up to this time, although a draft of the Constitution has been sent to this country and published, it contains nothing to suggest compliance with some of the conditions set forth in the proclamation by the President through Gen. Wood. It is that oversight which the Administration is disposed to consider as the result of careless consideration of the expressed wishes of the President that has provoked so much criticism of the news from Cuba and led to the free discussion of the probable submission of the question to Congress before Cuba shall be considered entitled to set its independent government in operation.

That there will be disappointment among the Cubans who have been influential in making the Constitution without conforming to the terms set out in the proclamation for the convention there is no doubt. But that the Cubans were proceeding in a measure according to their ideas of conformity is indicated in the language of a section of the printed draft which alludes to Gen. Wood's proclamation and the necessity for conforming to the rules laid down by him in selecting delegates. The expectation of the language of the Constitution is that the Cuban government is to be chosen by election ninety days after the promulgation of the Constitution. No expression of doubt as to whether the United States will be satisfied, but only the dictum of the constituent assembly.

All these conditions were fully considered by the Administration before the unofficial announcement was authorized yesterday that the President had no doubt of his right and duty to see that the Cuban Constitution shall be such an instrument as to enable the United States in approving it to protect itself while assuring to Cuba a stable government and to enable this country, until that is assured beyond reasonable doubt, to exercise its admitted privilege to see that no diplomatic disturbance or irrational tumult among factions in Cuba shall impose upon it the necessity for doing over again the expensive and trying work that it has already performed in order that Cuba might be free from the cruelty and rapacity of Spanish officers.

The course of events marked out in Havana by the language of the Constituent Assembly now seems to make it quite probable that it will be late in February before the completed Constitution will be here, and that the objections to it can be pointed out without the aid of Congress. The President has announced through a member of his Administration his belief that he is entitled to safeguard the interests of the United States in considering the Constitution. He has also made it clear that if Cuba manifests any unwillingness to accept the advice of the Administration, and demands a stronger expression of the will of the United States, still its military ruler, the President will ask the Congress to assemble for the purpose of sharing with him the task of impressing Cuba with the conviction in the United States that the right of free government is to be exercised there only after this country has been assured that Cuba will be restrained by pledges that it is our duty to exact and should be the pleasure of Cuba to extend, without hesitation and in her own best interest.