

The Situation in Cuba.

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE OF THE TIMES.

1.

HAVANA, April 3.—Since the adoption of the completed draft of the Cuban Constitution at the session of the convention held on Feb. 21 the minds of the delegates have wandered irresolute between opposite opinions. The nationalist sentiment inspires them to desire with ardor the large freedom of unconditioned sovereignty. Their sober judgment tells them that our indispensable friendship and the stability of their new Government will be best assured by respecting the wishes of the United States Congress. If they had possessed the courage and the confidence to trust to the guidance of sentiment they would have adjourned at once after adopting on Feb. 26 the meaningless "opinion" on relations with the United States. Logically, there was no course left but immediate adjournment; for to adopt an "opinion" and then continue in session to see what the other fellow thought about it was to confess publicly that if that opinion didn't suit another would be offered.

The sober judgment of the delegates—their fears, if you please—restrained them from the headlong unwisdom of giving to their opinion the character of an ultimatum, and they continue to beat about the bush for some deliverance from their dilemma, all the time, as it seems to me, drifting slowly but sensibly toward an acceptance of the terms of the Platt amendment.

The Cubans do not fear unfair treatment or "criminal aggression" from the United States. I do not learn that any of them suspect us of concealing under the Platt amendment a policy of stealthy encroachment and ultimate annexation. They simply look upon its terms as an assertion, to which they are asked to adhere, of their incapacity to govern themselves. It hurts their pride. They do not think we have expressed in a polite or considerate way our doubts about the matter. Several of the delegates have said to me, with pleading earnestness, "We do not want to be treated like children; we do not want to be forced to confess by accepting the terms offered by Congress that we are now, and expect to be indefinitely, in the position of a minor, not to be trusted with the care of our affairs."

Sovereignty is to these men, as it is to most men, the most precious word in the lexicon, for it is independence. They aspire to that blessed condition, not all of them with very clear notions about the nature and essentials of sovereignty, not all of them from motives of disinterested patriotism, but with a very real desire to reach the long-wished-for goal of freedom and nationality. As I sat in the Teatro Marti in the midst of a group of delegates after an adjournment for the day, discussing with them the meaning of the Platt amendment and its effect in controlling their destiny, Señor Sangulilly, who was perched upon a table, took from the breast pocket of his coat a copy of the Teller resolution, and read it as unemotionally as a schoolboy at his reading book until he came upon the word "sovereignty." Then his voice rose to a pitch and volume that awoke the echoes of the empty galleries. The galleries of the theatre where the sessions are held are always empty, by the way, or nearly so. Even on the great day when the convention was adopted and signed the people of Havana exhibited little interest in the proceeding. Gen. Wood has received barely thirty letters about the vital national matter of defining the relations of Cuba with the United States; but written protests by the hundred, six hundred or more, I believe, poured in upon him when he suggested a reduction in the amount of money devoted to police service in Havana. Political theories and the eloquence of the cafés awaken the interest of the Cubans, but outside of the active persons of the constituent drama most of them seem to feel that the business of creating a Constitution under which their laws will be made and their rights as citizens determined is a pretty dull spectacle. They will exhibit a livelier interest when it comes to the question of distributing the offices and the patronage; so do our own countrymen, for that matter, when a new Administration reaches that point. If the convention here were a military commission, sitting in fine uniforms, and considering military matters, the galleries of the Teatro Marti would be crowded daily. But it is not strange that this recently emancipated people have not yet come to the stage of an awakened interest in civil affairs.

The section of the Platt amendment which the majority of the delegates most passionately resent is the third, in which the Government of Cuba is asked to consent that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence and the maintenance of a Government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty. That, they hold, would extort from them the humiliating confession that they are children. "How can one sovereign nation give to another the right to intervene in its affairs?" Gen. Portuondo asked me; "that concession destroys independence." It was in vain that I pointed out that the express object of the intervention was to preserve their independence. Nor was I more successful with the argument that with or without the Platt amendment Cuban sovereignty could not be more complete than that of Spain, against which for our own protection and under the general sanction of international law we had intervened; and upon a future like occasion we should be compelled to take like action. "Very well," he said, "do so, under your general sanction, but you ought not to ask us to give you in advance the general right to intervene at your discretion. It takes away from our sovereignty." The point that very great and powerful nations are constantly making treaties with each other by which they voluntarily divest themselves of certain sovereign rights, and that Cuba might with advantage agree to a friendly intervention to avert the serious evils of intervention by force of arms appeared to have no weight with the General.

It was very early made known to me that the delegates with whom I talked do not understand the Platt amendment. They had misconstrued the all-important third section. It was also a General—not Portuondo—and one of the most serious minded and intelligent men in the convention, who protested to me against the demand that Cuba should permit the United States to interfere for the enforcement of the municipal law and the protection of life, property, and individual liberty. I observed that I was quite of his opinion, but fortunately no such demand had been made. Upon his insisting that it was made in the Platt amendment a copy of that declaration was produced. Even when the text was read, showing that the demand was for the right to intervene to maintain "a Government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty," and that the Cuban Government, not the United

States Government, must exclusively concern itself with internal affairs of that nature, my friend the General was only shaken, not convinced. I think this misunderstanding is general in the convention. It appears in the argument accompanying the "opinion." While there are several Generals, veterans of the wars of insurrection, in the convention there are lawyers also. I am informed that few of them have been trained by the practice of their profession, and although the subject of Cuban relations with this Nation belongs to the domain of international law, I have been unable to discover either from conversation with the delegates or from a perusal of the Journal of the Sessions and of the "Opinion" and its accompanying argument, that any member of the convention commands a lawyer-like familiarity with the principles and precedents of the law of nations. One delegate told me that the Cuban Government would pledge itself that the soil of the island should never be made use of by our enemy in any war in which we were engaged, but in wars of other nations, why, it wouldn't care. But this delegate was a General, not a lawyer.

There are but two other sections of the Platt amendment to which serious objection is made—the sixth, providing that the title to the Isle of Pines shall be left to future adjustment by treaty, and the seventh, relating to the sale or lease of lands for United States coaling or naval stations. They are mystified by the evident wish of the United States to acquire the Isle of Pines. Since Columbus first discovered Cuba, I presume no Cuban until now has ever set a high value upon the Isle of Pines. What could the United States want of that little islet, surrounded by shallow water and almost unapproachable, except for little fruit boats? I confess that I had no idea of the intentions of our Government until I read in one of the Havana papers that a United States Naval Lieutenant had returned from an expedition of exploration and survey to the Isle of Pines, reporting that the bay upon the west coast of the island has thirty-six feet of water inside and at present sixteen feet on the bar—the making of a good harbor within less than two days' run for a man-of-war from Greytown, at the eastern end of the Nicaragua Canal. If the Cubans have taken note of the Lieutenant's report, they doubtless have also observed that Cienfuegos is within easy reach and Santiago de Cuba not a day's sail distant from this possible future naval station. The Cubans are really in the dark about the manner in which we intend to acquire title to the Isle of Pines. Are we going to buy the property, or is it our contention that it is not a part of the Island of Cuba, and so came to us from Spain as one of the "other islands" of the West Indies ceded with Porto Rico in Article II. of the treaty? The island is incontestably a part of Cuba, and has always been under the Government of the Province of Havana. The Cubans will not quarrel with us over the Isle of Pines or the demand for naval stations. We should expect to pay in both cases, which makes a difference. And there is a feeling among them that our National interests require established bases of operations in West Indian waters, which it would be a friendly act on their part to supply. If the intervention section were disposed of the objections to Sections 6 and 7 would be readily waived.

My own impression is that in the end all objections will be waived and the Platt amendment accepted. No one can pretend that the United States has not the right and the duty to impose upon the Cubans the conditions essential to its own peace and security. The possible range lies between permanent military occupation and dependency, at the one extreme, and an independence as untrammelled as that of Great Britain or Germany at the other. It is very plain that these delegates feel in their hearts that we have imposed conditions very much nearer the latter extreme than the former; in fact, that we have been easy with them, very much easier than Sir Alfred Milner with his "irreducible minimum" demanded of the Boers. Their arguments against the third section, even, are transparently faint-hearted. They seem to feel that they are unable to make out a good case either from the point of view of our rights or their interest. They say frankly that they want no army, no navy. They know perfectly well that their powerful neighbor will attend to their defense against foreign aggression. They recognize the correlative necessity of foregoing the right to make war as one that we cannot accord to them. Admitting all these things, they must and do see that the concessions demanded by Congress are moderate and do not transcend the limits of reasonable preparation for the duties we assume and must put ourselves in a position to perform. Unquestionably, too, they feel misgivings about the stability and successful operation of civil government by and for themselves without external safeguards. The real substance of their opposition is that it hurts their pride to write themselves down children.

This divided state of their minds manifests itself in their conversation as well as in their acts. And all the time they are under a silent, but, as I judge, increasing, pressure from two directions. Everybody learns on visiting Cuba that the property owners and conservative class are frankly for annexation to the United States. They want peace and civil order, a chance to do business and re-create the fallen industries of the island. The flag and the authority of the United States assure peace and order. They gravely distrust the capacity of any Government of Cubans to give a like assurance. In fact, they foresee certain tumult and disorder. This class of the people of Cuba has abstained from political activities, but their influence is felt and their doubt and distrust put some restraint upon the extremists. The other and more powerful influence that deprives them of the courage of their inclinations and unnerves the hot-heads is the admirable administration of Gen. Wood and the visible progress of the island in prosperity, civilization, and sanitation during the American occupation. The hundreds of schools established, the public works undertaken, the laborers employed at good wages, the practically complete suppression of yellow fever during a great part of the year, and the clean cities and the remarkable freedom of the island from crime and beggary stand as an illuminating example of the fruits of American administration. In urging their weak conjecture against this solid certainty they feel their disadvantage, and their hearts fall them at every step. They may have some misgivings as to the support they would have from the people. They do not want to take any action that might provoke at Washington any greater distrust of their wisdom and capacity than is now felt. The desire to maintain good relations prompts the suggestion now under discussion to send a commission to Washington. An attempt has been made by liberal daily quotations from the anti-imperialist press in the United States to persuade them that the Platt amendment will be abandoned by Congress as soon as it "hears from the people." Very few of them are so foolish as to believe this. They want more time to make up their minds. A commission to Washington would give them time.

C. R. M.