

OUR RELATION TO THE PEOPLE OF CUBA AND PORTO RICO.

By HON. ORVILLE H. PLATT,
United States Senator from Connecticut.

We have undertaken the solution of a very difficult problem in Cuba. When we went to war with Spain we declared that the people of Cuba ought to be free and independent, and we therefore disclaimed any purpose to acquire the island, and promised that when its pacification should be accomplished we would leave it to its people. To this declaration and promise we are solemnly pledged as a nation. Reduced to its simplest terms our pledge is this : that the United States becomes responsible for the establishment and orderly continuance of republican government in Cuba. If, as some seem to suppose, the full performance of our obligation only requires us to see that a so-called republic is organized there, the task is comparatively easy, but if we are also bound to provide for the orderly continuance of a genuine republic it is by no means easy. That the latter duty is as imperative as the former, can scarcely be questioned. Indeed, it seems to be questioned only in a technical way. Certain self-constituted and virulent critics try to maintain that our promise to leave the island to its people as soon as it should be pacified meant that when we should have driven out Spain we would ourselves retire and have nothing further to do with its affairs, either by way of guiding the Cubans in the establishment of their government, or assisting them to maintain their independence.

In other words, it seems to be supposed by these carping people that the United States has no interests to protect in the Island of Cuba and that no matter what its people may do, we are only to look on. But even these critics admit

(145)



that if conditions under the new government shall become intolerable, intervention will again be justifiable and imperative. They would have us at once terminate our military occupation leaving the future uncared for with the expectation that, should troubles arise there, either by reason of foreign demands or internal disorders, by which our interests are imperiled, we will return in force to set matters right again. It seems scarcely possible that such a policy should find advocates in any quarter. Unless we provide now for continued independence and peace in the Island of Cuba there is no way in which they can be assured unless, in case the necessity arises, we declare war and enter upon the business of subjugating and annexing it. It must be seen by all who have the real welfare of our country at heart that our only true policy is to see that a republican government is now established under conditions which recognize our right to maintain its stability and prosperity. Cuba has menaced our peace quite too long, and having once undertaken to remedy an intolerable condition there it would be inexcusable folly to ignore the possibility and indeed probability of future trouble, or to fail to guard against its recurrence.

All rights acquired by the act of intervention exist except so far as they are limited by the resolution of Congress, and the only limitation imposed by that legislation rightly construed is that we will not claim Cuba as a part of the United States. We took temporary possession of the island with a self-imposed trust which requires us to allow its people to establish a free and independent government, and also to assist in its maintenance as an orderly, stable, and beneficent one. The difficulty of the situation arises from the fact that it would be improper for the United States to dictate the provisions of the constitution which is to be the basis of the new government, except to an extent necessary for its own self-protection, and the discharge of obligations growing out of its intervention. We have a right to insist that there shall be provisions in the constitution of Cuba, or

attached to it by way of an ordinance, which will clearly define the relations which are to exist between the two countries, but all matters relating to the system and detail of government should be left to the people of Cuba alone. For instance, although we may feel that universal suffrage will result in trouble and difficulty, we manifestly have no right to prescribe the elective franchise.

The framework of government must be left by us to the constitutional convention without dictation or mandatory suggestion. So far as the rights of the people are concerned they must be left absolutely free to declare them. So far as our rights are concerned, we may insist on their recognition without in any way impairing or interfering with the independence of Cuba. The war with Spain was undertaken to put an end to intolerable conditions not only shocking to humanity, but menacing our welfare, and our work was but half done when the authority of Spain was destroyed. We became responsible to the people of Cuba, to ourselves, and the world at large, that a good government should be established and maintained in place of the bad one to which we put an end. The practical question then is, in what way can the United States provide for a government in Cuba which shall not only secure the blessings of liberty there in their full exercise, but shall also secure to the United States the results of good government in a country so closely adjoining us?

The right to intervene for the abolition of a bad government, and the right to intervene for the maintenance of a good government in Cuba, rest upon the same foundation. It is as much our duty to exercise our power in the maintenance of an independent, stable and peaceful government there as it was to exercise it in the destruction of a monarchical, oppressive and inhuman one. Duty and self-interest coincide in this respect. The extension of the principles and institutions of free government, wherever possible and practicable, is no less our duty than the protection of our

own citizens in all their rights and interests in a foreign country. By every consideration, then, which can bind a nation, we are committed and pledged to the policy of permitting the people of Cuba to establish, for and by themselves, a republican government for the continuance and maintenance of which we are to be responsible.

If the element of our responsibility were eliminated from the problem, it would be quite safe to say that the experiment of free government has never been attempted in the world under circumstances less favorable to permanent success. To insure the success of free government, certain conditions seem indispensable. There must be a homogeneous people possessed of a high degree of virtue and intelligence. A sentimental longing for liberty will not of itself insure the maintenance of a republic. Liberty is a word of quite elastic meaning. License is not true liberty. It is orderly liberty only which constitutes the sure basis of free government. That government only is really free and independent where liberty is restrained and buttressed by law, and where the supposed rights of the individual are limited by the rights of all. To establish such liberty there must be an intelligent understanding of the social system and a comprehension of the just principles upon which true government must always rest. The consent of the governed must be an intelligent consent. Where the capacity to consent does not exist, no government can be permanently maintained upon such consent. Where a majority of voters neither understand nor respect the true principles of government, there may be a republic in name, but in fact it will only be a dictatorship, in which the purpose and power of its president control rather than the consent of the governed.

Social, racial and economic conditions in Cuba do not at first sight promise well for the permanence of republican government. In passing, we must remember the fact that none of its people have had any experience in self-government, and the further fact that all their notions of govern-

ment have been framed and moulded by the history and administration of one of the most arbitrary and corrupt the world has ever known. The lines which mark the division of classes are most distinctly drawn, and the interests of the different classes are most diverse.

The census of Cuba recently taken fails to give us statistics in many important particulars. It informs us as to the proportion of the white and colored population, and of the native and foreign born. It shows that the number engaged in gainful occupations is somewhat larger comparatively than in the United States, but it fails to give us any statistics as to property and wealth.

Cuba is essentially an agricultural state. Its soil is very fertile and its climate is such that a failure of crops is seldom known. It has hitherto had the disadvantage that its agriculture industry was mainly concentrated in the production of two crops only, sugar and tobacco. While there is opportunity for great diversification of agriculture, the profits arising from sugar and tobacco have been such that other products have been neglected. The foreign trade of the island, exports and imports combined, has amounted to \$100,000,000 annually, and when we reflect that this foreign trade is from an island containing only a million and half of people, it is easy to see how profitable these two products have been under favorable conditions. As a result of these industries, there was, before the war with Spain, great wealth in Cuba. The distinction made between Spaniards and Cubans is simply that of birthplace, persons born in Spain being classed as Spaniards, and all persons born in Cuba, being classed as Cubans.

The Spaniards are the wealthy class. They are commercial people. They carry on trade and business, loan money, but do not as a class acquire landed property. They are merchants, bankers, traders, money lenders; they have all the commercial instincts and characteristics of the Jew, derived perhaps from the Jewish population of Spain in

former times. The proportion of Spaniards to the entire population is small—130,000 only in round numbers, at the time of taking the census, out of a total population of 1,600,000, were Spaniards. About sixty per cent of this number, under the treaty of Paris, retained their allegiance to Spain. The proportion of adult males among Spaniards is very much greater than that of any other class of the population, 86,000 out of 130,000 being males over twenty-one years of age. Most of the ready money of the island is controlled by these Spaniards.

The land of Cuba is owned, generally speaking, by white Cubans. The number of land-owners in proportion to the population is not given, but their number is comparatively small. Considerable quantities of land are owned by persons residing in Spain and other countries, but the cultivated part of the island has been owned very largely by these Cuban planters. In recent times, some Americans and other foreigners have acquired estates, but the percentage of land thus held is small. It may then be said that the wealth and property of the island is concentrated in the hands of the Spaniards and a comparatively few white Cubans. Small holdings by persons cultivating land, as in the United States, are practically unknown in Cuba. The larger proportion of the inhabitants, both white and colored, are not property-holders and have no direct interest in the soil or in the business of the island.

The classes controlling wealth and property took little or no part in the revolution. The Spaniards, of course, were loyal to Spain, and most of the Cuban land-owners tried to preserve their neutrality as between the revolutionists and the Spanish government, often paying tribute to both sides in the hope of saving their estates from destruction. There is little sympathy between the wealthy and land-owning classes in Cuba and the great bulk of its population. The active revolutionary element consisted of white Cubans, who, as has been said, have little or no property interests

at stake ; they were the officers of the insurgent forces ; the mulattoes constituted the rank and file, or fighting element of the revolution.

Naturally the conservative and property-holding class, and the radical and revolutionary class, thoroughly distrust each other. Property owners think property will not be safe if the revolutionary element shall be in control, and the radicals think that the property-owning and business element secretly favors annexation, in which it is encouraged by the United States. For this reason principally the radical leaders exhibit symptoms of hostility toward us. Those who own property in Cuba do look to the United States for protection; quite likely they are annexationists at heart. While there is little or no annexation sentiment in the United States, it is almost impossible to convince Cubans of that fact. The radicals think that we are not sincere when we tell them that annexation is the last thing desired by the United States, and the conservatives hope that in the end events may necessitate annexation.

If the present Cuban leaders can be brought to understand and realize that the United States is as much opposed to annexation as they are, fully sympathizes with them in their desire for independence and has no intention of limiting or impairing that independence, their objection to the propositions submitted to them by Congress, defining our future relations, will doubtless be modified. Cuban property owners felt the oppression of Spain but feared a government which would be established if the revolutionists succeeded, quite as much as they did the Spanish government. Such fear still continues, and as they are in a minority, they have hitherto refrained from any participation in the effort to establish a new government, confidently expecting the United States to protect them in the enjoyment of life, liberty and property.

Politically, the people may be divided into five classes. First, Spaniards, including both those who have retained

their Spanish allegiance and those who have become Cuban citizens ; second, Autonomists, or white Cubans, who remained loyal during the war and undertook the task of organizing government under the autonomy at last conceded by Spain ; third, white Cubans, who tried to preserve their neutrality ; fourth, white Cuban revolutionists ; and fifth, the colored class, a large proportion of which participated in the revolution. Between these different classes there is little of sympathy, much of distrust. Even the Spaniards and the Autonomists do not affiliate, and at present there seems little prospect that there can be any political union among those who may be called the conservative people of Cuba. Their interests would lead them to unite, but their prejudices and suspicions forbid.

There remains, then, the larger proportion of Cuban citizens who may be classed as radical revolutionists. In the United States they would be called agitators. Delegates representing this class of the population appear to be in control of the Cuban constitutional convention. They seem to feel that by reason of the fact that they were revolutionists they alone are entitled to take part in the establishment and management of a new government.

They have very imperfect ideas of the practical duties or responsibilities of a free government, but are intensely devoted to liberty as they understand it. Instead of being grateful to the United States for the part it took in the liberation of Cuba, they appear to cherish a spirit of hostility towards us because they have not already been put in actual possession of the government. Under the military government of the island they have held and still hold nearly all of the civil offices, but recognize very little obligation to that government. One thing must be understood. Every Cuban, whether a revolutionist or otherwise, is essentially Spanish in all his traits and characteristics. There are as yet no well-defined political parties in Cuba. The conservatives have not been able to affiliate sufficiently to organize a

conservative party, and party divisions among the revolutionists are not based upon different policies or principles, but rather upon individual leadership. The social and economic conditions, thus briefly outlined, do not on their face promise much for permanence of republican government, but as time progresses, necessity and mutual interest may wear away prejudices and distrust, and permit something like united effort by the more conservative classes.

In addition to the difficulties enumerated, there is the inevitable race problem. There is not as yet a race issue in Cuban politics. Whether there will be, time only can determine. Prejudice on account of color is either less than in the United States or of a different quality. Certainly neither blacks nor mixed bloods are regarded as inferiors to the same extent as with us, and in the matter of social distinction color plays but a comparatively unimportant part. White and colored laborers work side by side without friction or contention. Maceo was honored and esteemed as perhaps the ablest revolutionary general, and Gualberto Gomez is regarded as one of the ablest delegates in the constitutional convention. Universal suffrage was adopted in the proposed constitution without a suggestion and presumably without a thought that a colored man was not as much entitled to be a voter as a white man.

The colored people, including blacks and mixed bloods, constitute about one-third of the population of Cuba. In some of the provinces like Santiago and Matanzas, the proportion is much larger; in Santiago forty-five per cent, in Matanzas forty per cent, while in some of the provinces it is comparatively small, in Puerto Principe only twenty per cent. It is an illiterate population. Only twenty-eight per cent of the colored population of the island can read. True, the white population is also illiterate, only forty-nine per cent of which can read. These facts are very suggestive when we consider the possibility of maintaining a republican government. In the ascertainment of these statistics of

illiteracy it is assumed that all children under ten years of age attending school can read, so that the proportion of adult males who can read will be somewhat less than indicated.

The colored population of Cuba differs essentially from that in the United States, or in the other West India Islands. The number of pure blacks is not given in the census. The proportion is small. In appearance they differ essentially from the negro of the United States. They are absolutely black, but their features are more European in cast. They are not thick-lipped, and, except for color, would be taken as splendid physical types of the Caucasian race. How this physical difference is to be accounted for we can only conjecture by assuming that the slaves imported into Cuba came from different sections of Africa than those imported into the United States. The blacks in Cuba appear to be of a superior type as to capacity and efficiency, but the mulatto compares less favorably with the mulatto in the United States. This is accounted for probably both by blood and environment. Mulattoes in the United States are a mixture of the Anglo-Saxon and negro ; in Cuba, of the Spaniard and negro. The negro imitates the whites with whom he is brought up, so in the United States he imitates the character of the Anglo-Saxon ; in Cuba, the character of the Spaniard.

In the United States he therefore naturally aspires to participate in government ; in Cuba he seems to have very little such aspiration. He is industrious, docile, quiet, and cares for little beyond his immediate domestic and industrial surroundings. The colored voter in Cuba is not likely to be a disturbing political element, unless under a sense of wrong and injustice his emotions are excited, then, indeed, he becomes a good fighter, as was proved in the late revolution. He may possibly be influenced by the agitator and demagogue, but it will require a very deep realization of injustice to make him a dangerous factor in the politics of the island. That he will vote intelligently can scarcely be expected. His vote may aid in putting dangerous men in power, but he will

not greatly interest himself in the affairs of the government.

The colored population of Cuba presents a most interesting sociological problem. The admixture of blood in his veins exceeds, perhaps, that of the mulatto in any other part of the world. The Spaniard himself is the result of an admixture of blood running through centuries, and the difference in appearance of Spaniards in Cuba is so great that the type is hardly perceptible. The race problem, as it appears in the white Cuban population, is quite as interesting as when confined to the colored population. The Spaniards in Cuba have come from the different sections of Spain, and the same is true of the ancestors of the white Cubans. Spaniards differ in appearance and characteristics more than the inhabitants of almost any other country. The history of Spain for a thousand years was that of conquest, of colonization and assimilation of its native people with its conquerors and colonies. Phœnicians, Greeks, Romans, Goths, Moors and Jews successively occupied Spain, and with the exception of the Jews controlled its government and amalgamated with its people. Its different provinces have developed different types of manhood, and Cuba has received its immigration from every province. Its generals, officials, nobility, soldiery and its peasantry alike peopled Cuba. In the veins of the Cuban mulatto it is thus possible that there runs an infinitesimal current of the blood of Phœnician, Greek, Roman, Gothic and Moorish ancestors transmitted through its Spanish progenitors. We are ourselves becoming a very mixed population, and yet hardly more so than the population of Cuba which we have been wont to call Spanish.

It will be seen, therefore, that the different classes of Cuban population have little in common, except a desire for liberty, as yet scarcely understood, and a pride of country. Whether these two common ties will be strong enough to insure an orderly, well-balanced, peaceful government remains to be seen. The elements of discord are in full play now, and if

these alone were regarded the outlook would not be very hopeful. It is by no means certain, however, that the colored citizens in Cuba may not in the end ally themselves with the conservative rather than with the revolutionary and turbulent forces. A hopeful indication of this is found in the fact that in the province of Santiago, where the colored element is numerically stronger than in any other province, delegates in the convention have been instructed at mass meetings called for that purpose to accept the amendment proposed at the recent session of Congress.

The results of education will not be immediately manifest, but perhaps the most hopeful sign of responsible and permanent government in Cuba is to be seen in the educational work already begun there. If the next few years can be tided over successfully, intelligence will doubtless come to the rescue. At present there is discord, ignorance, and, among the masses of the people, indifference. We must hope that prejudice and suspicion between those who have most at stake will be allayed, that the intelligent and conservative element will more and more assert itself, and that the great need of Cuba for independence, peace and prosperity will unite a majority of its people to labor for that end.

But the real hope for a free Cuba is to be found in the friendly advice and guidance, and, if necessary, the assistance of the United States. There will be no American colonization there in the strict sense of the word. That American capital will go there as soon as there is a government under which its safety is assured, there is no question; that our American laborers will go there to any considerable extent is improbable, not that climatic conditions are such that it is impossible for them to work and live there, but that industrial conditions will not, for a long time at least, be such as to furnish inducements to the American who desires to support himself by his own labor to emigrate to Cuba. The island may easily support a population of five millions, or, as many think, a much larger number; but the question of

its increase of population depends largely upon where its laborers are to come from.

There is little prospect that the colored race will increase proportionately from natural causes. The labor required to fully develop its agricultural industries must come from abroad. The American negro is no more likely to go there than the white laborer of the United States. Industrially, then, as well as politically, the future of Cuba depends largely upon its immigration, which at present comes from Northern Spain and the Canary Islands. These immigrants, amounting to 40,000 or more last year, are still Spaniards, but may be classified as Spanish peasantry. They seem adapted to the climate, and the wages which they can command far exceed what they can obtain in their home country. They are industrious, peaceable and domestic—in a word, calculated to make good citizens. If properly treated by the capitalists who employ them, they are liable to constitute not only a stable, but an influential part of the population. Four things, then, seem to promise good results: The guidance and aid of the United States, the education of Cuban children, the probable conservatism of the colored population, and the industrial and peaceful character of probable immigrants. The revolutionary class will not at once abandon the idea that they alone are entitled to govern, and there will doubtless be more or less friction, contention and disturbance, but as time wears on, it is to be hoped that out of confusion order may come.

The hands of the United States are indeed partially tied. There is a limit beyond which it may not go, and yet within the legitimate limits which it has prescribed for itself it can do much. It may not interfere with the liberty of the people of Cuba to establish an independent government, republican in form and fact; it may, and must, for its own protection, and in the discharge of obligations from which it cannot escape if it would, see to it that the independence of Cuba shall not be overthrown, no matter from what quarter it may

be assailed, and that life, property and individual rights shall be as secure there as in the United States.

That the relations which are to exist between the United States and the new government of Cuba must be closer than those between us and any other foreign country will be apparent to the dullest comprehension. So long as any doubt exists of the ability of Cuba to stand alone, the United States must be ready to support her. We must protect her against any demands which will impair her independence, and against any internal dissensions which may threaten the overthrow of republican government. In thus standing ready, and insisting upon our right to protect Cuba, we do not at all contemplate the establishment of a protectorate in any sense in which that term has been used in international law. Our relations with Cuba will be unique. We may best express them by saying that we claim the right to be recognized as the guarantor of Cuban independence and of the stability of its government. To require less than this would be an abandonment of both self-interest and duty.

We propose to leave Cuba free to make treaties with foreign powers not inconsistent with her independence; to enact all legislation which a free and independent government may enact, to manage her own affairs in her own way, provided only that she does not thereby imperil her own safety and our peace. And yet our right to intervene to save Cuba even from herself must be recognized. We cannot permit any foreign power to obtain a foothold in Cuba. We cannot permit disturbances there which threaten the overthrow of her government. We cannot tolerate a condition in which life and property shall be insecure. In all this our position is that of unselfishness. We do not seek our own aggrandisement; we do not ask reimbursement for the lives and treasure spent in the effort to secure the blessings of liberty and free government to Cuba.

We have undertaken to do for her people what no nation in all history has ever undertaken to do for another, namely,

to overthrow an inhuman and iniquitous government in order that a just, humane and beneficent government may be established and maintained in its stead. Half of our work is accomplished, half of it remains to be done. We have no doubt that the remaining half of our duty will be performed in the same spirit and with the same unselfishness which has characterized our work from its commencement. Having put our hand to the plow, we may not, and will not, look back. It is a great and glorious work which we have undertaken. The difficulties and intricacies which confront us should only stimulate us to a more conscientious performance of duty. In spite of all discouragement we look for a free and regenerated Cuba, for which we may with self-respect and even pride stand sponsor.