

A Congressman's Opinion.

Congressman Slayden of Texas made a visit to Cuba after congress adjourned. After his return he wrote an article from which the following extracts are taken:

When I was in Cuba there was just one absorbing topic. It was printed about in the newspapers, debated in the convention and eloquently discussed in the shops and on the streets. Nearly all American visitors to Cuba had come back and reported that the Cubans were virtually unanimous in their eagerness to accept the Platt amendment and end the military control. I found that they were practically unanimous, but the unanimity was for the rejection of the conditions imposed by the extraordinary amendment to the army appropriation bill. These conditions may be finally accepted; but it will never be done by the free will of the Cubans. They were perplexed and distressed at the situation. They feel that their great, strong northern neighbor who rendered them invaluable aid in an hour of need is menacing that which as a people they hold most dear. They are profoundly grieved.

The charge of ingratitude against the Cubans is not well founded. They are keenly alive to the obligations they owe the United States and covet the opportunity to discharge the debt. They have not forgotten that it was through the intervention of the military forces of this country that the Spaniards were driven out of the island. Nor will they be permitted to forget, for there is a type of American now traveling in Cuba who constantly bawls from every street corner that the Cubans are ungrateful, that they are nothing but a lot of negroes and half breeds, that they are unfit for and incapable of self-government and that for their own good they should be annexed.

All this irritates the Cubans. It would exasperate a less sensitive people. It makes the work of our officials there even more difficult than it would be and at best the problems to be solved are delicate and perplexing.

It has been so often and so generally stated by returning tourists that the conservative commercial classes of Cuba desired annexation that I hesitate to put on record the directly contrary conclusions at which I arrived.

Of course there are annexationists in Cuba, but they are few in number. Among them are to be found sugar planters who want access to our markets without the vexatious intervention of custom houses, land owners who look to the United States for buyers and Americans who have investments in the island and for both business and sentimental reasons desire the protection of our flag.

I heard of one American who has a splendid sugar plantation in the province of Santa Clara. He is said to have been violently opposed to the war for independence and, through powerful friends in the United States, to have exerted influence with Mr. Cleveland's administration for the benefit of the Spanish government. He had no sympathy with struggling patriots under Gomez and Garcia and has none now with their efforts to set up a government. What he wants is a market for his crops. His whole theory of government revolves about his plantation. His judgment as a man of business is good, but his views on policies of government are entitled to no respect. Free sugar markets would reconcile him to the rule of an autocrat.

There is a small and rapidly disappearing element which desires annexation for political reasons. It is what remains of the old autonomist party.

They were really content with the government of Spain, but realizing that the majority of the islanders did not share their sentiments, they sought a

middle ground between dependence and independence which would have left the island a colony of Spain with just enough self-government to keep the Cubans quiet. The leading autonomists of 1896-1897 are now members of the republican party of Cuba and earnestly working for absolute Cuban independence.

Another element in Cuba which desires annexation, or preferably a continuance of the military occupation, is made up of those Cubans who for the first time in their lives are on a pay roll, the obligations of which are regularly met. They are unimportant in numbers and void of influence.

Salvador Cisneros y Betancourt, who was the Marquis of Santa Lucia, is one of the most interesting and picturesque figures in Cuban history. Heir to great wealth and a patent of nobility, he sacrificed both for the cause of freedom. Those American patriots who in 1776 pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honors to the cause of liberty offered no greater price for independence than did this fine old Cuban gentleman.

Mr. Cisneros was educated in Philadelphia and has been a close student of American history and institutions throughout his long life. After the unsuccessful war of 1868 he became a citizen of our country and worked as earnestly for annexation as he now opposes it. "Could I have shown in any better way," he said to me, "my respect for the government and people of the United States? If I am not to be a citizen of the free republic of Cuba, certainly I prefer to be a citizen of your country." He voluntarily relinquished his title and has spent a fortune fighting for the freedom of his beloved island. For fifty-three years he has been an insurgent. His distress over the turn of affairs is almost pitiful. All his struggles and sacrifices and the labors of a long and unselfish life are to be cheated of their last reward by the resolutions of a lot of politicians.

He said, in substance, that the pretense of the annexationists, plantation owners and others, that the Cubans are incapable of self-government, is not well founded. There is no danger of friction between the Cubans and Spaniards. They are one in religion and language, and these are ties that make for social harmony. There were not a few Spaniards in the patriot army. Many Spaniards wanted to cut loose from the prejudices and tyrannies of the decaying Spanish kingdom and they were willing to fight for it. The Spaniards do not fear the future of Cuba. Spanish immigrants by the hundreds come to Cuba every month and go into the country, where they begin the cultivation of the soil. They are rapidly absorbed in the body of the Cuban people and help to still further widen the disparity in numbers between the whites and blacks. Mr. Cisneros does not look upon the negro question as being a serious menace to the tranquility of Cuba. He says that slavery was a curse to both his and our country, but he believes that the vexatious social problem growing out of it is working itself out even more rapidly in Cuba than in the United States. The negroes were loyal Cubans during the war for independence, and Maceo, the negro, was a brilliant military chieftain whose talent was freely recognized.

From my notebook I will now try to quote his exact language: "I am opposed to the Platt amendment, and as a delegate in the convention shall vote for its rejection. I feel sure that the people who sent me here will indorse my position. Whatever sentiment for annexation we had in the island is rapidly dying out. Some people think that we will have a history like that of Texas, a few years of independence and then admission to the American union. I do not think so and I do not

believe it should be so. The dominant element in Texas was Anglo-Saxon. It spoke the same tongue and was of the bone and flesh of the American people. Union under such circumstances was natural and proper.

"But here the case is different. We speak a different language and are of the Latin blood. We are using the government of the United States as a model upon which to shape ours. We desire the closest possible trade and social relations with the United States. We are willing, indeed we are anxious, to make commercial treaties with your government which will be entirely satisfactory to your people. We will go as far as possible in our concessions to the United States, merely stopping short of offense to other governments with which we wish to live on peaceful terms.

"Our people are overwhelmingly against the Platt amendment. Even the majority of the Spaniards are with us in opposing it. When a Spaniard advocates annexation his opinion is claimed to be that of all Spanish residents. When they make a demonstration of free Cuba it is said to be due to enmity growing out of the war."

Mr. Carlos Zaldo, who was educated as a lawyer, but is a merchant and banker, said: "I think the people of Cuba should be allowed a government to meet their own views. They have earned this right by their labors and sacrifices and it was solemnly pledged to them in the Teller resolutions. The people of Cuba are conservative. Certainly I am and I believe that the constitution which we have prepared insures it. I am in commerce and commerce demands stability and conservatism. The Cubans who wish independent government are land owners and long for tranquility.

"The Platt amendment takes away from us the very essence of sovereignty and undertakes to treat us as children and incompetents. Certainly we desire complete sanitation and will secure it as rapidly as our resources will permit. We need no guardians to warn us against the dangers of filth and disease.

"The claim to the Isle of Pines is preposterous. It is a part of Cuba, and a subdivision of the province of Habana. The people there are Cubans and in sympathy with us. It has been recognized as a part of Cuba since the discovery of the island and has in fact been so recognized by the American government. Elections were held there for delegates to the constitutional convention and with the consent of the United States these delegates, so chosen, now sit in the convention.

"The claim of the United States to this island is, I fear, a mere pretense, the purpose of which is to have a military station near Cuba.

"We had nothing to do with the making of the Monroe doctrine and will not be consulted as to its continuance. But it does exist and will not, I apprehend, be abandoned, and while it exists no country in Europe will dare to meddle with Cuba. We do not fear trouble in that direction. We will only have commercial relations with Europe and even these—as England does in the case of Portugal—will be largely influenced and shaped by the United States.

"I would like to see absolute free trade with the United States, but hardly see now how it can be done as

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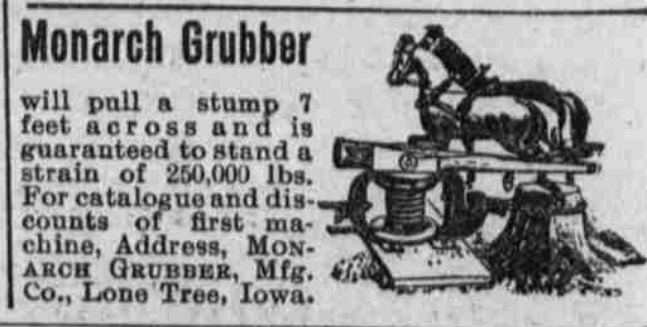
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