

GEN. MCMAHON'S OPINIONS

IN REGARD TO

THE PARAGUAYAN WAR.

A FEW REMARKS IN ANSWER TO HIS
ASSERTIONS.

The declaration of General McMahon before the Congressional Committee charged with the investigation of certain events lately occurred in Paraguay, in which several officers and representatives of the United States have been more or less complicated, a detailed notice of which appeared in the "New York Evening Mail" of the 4th instant, shows evidently that the General completely ignores the history and geography of those countries, as well as the most elemental antecedents of the questions at issue ; an ignorance that is the cause of his falling into great errors every time that he attempts to judge of the alliance, the war, its causes, and of Lopez himself.

We confess that we expected something more serious from a person of the intelligence of General McMahon, and who has lived so near the theatre of events; but it happens sometimes that objects are but badly seen when the observer places himself too near them. This excuse the General may claim to justify his ignorance of the questions he attempts to explain. We

may add to this that Lopez having been defeated in every battle ever since the arrival of the General in Paraguay, he must have had little time to give his guest and confidant better information; and that the latter, who followed Lopez in his hasty retreats, must have lacked the means and opportunity of consulting historical documents, or of becoming acquainted with anything else except what the Dictator deemed it proper to communicate to him. It is only thus that we are able to understand how General McMahan can mention "the control of the River Plate" as the principal cause of the war, and that he should subsequently say that in his invasion of Brazilian and Argentine territories Lopez observed the law of nations.

To the first of these assertions, we answer that the Paraguayan Dictator never alleged this cause to justify his conduct, nor did he ever complain of it in his numerous documents relating to the war. The Argentine government did not dream of opposing the free navigation of the River Plate and its affluents, a freedom guaranteed by treaties since 1853, and since then enjoyed by all nations. Lopez, on the contrary, did not go further than to speak of subscribing to what had been done by the Argentine Republic, as is proved by the cases of the Water Witch, Vermejo river exploration, and the erection of the fortress of Humaita, at the entrance of his fluvial dominions. We challenge General McMahan to prove the contrary.

In regard to the second assertion — that which states that Lopez did not violate the law of nations — we refer the reader to a dispatch of Mr. Edward Thornton to Lord Russell, dated April 24, 1866, in

which he calls barbarous Lopez's attack on Corrientes. — (Correspondence respecting hostilities in the River Plate, part III.) Everybody knows that without a previous declaration of war the Argentine Province was invaded by a strong army of Paraguayans, and that two men-of-war were captured while lying at anchor, to the great surprise of their commanders, who, knowing their country to be at peace with all the world, had not even taken the precaution of having steam ready.

Rear Admiral Elliot informed the English Admiralty of Lopez's invasion in the following terms: "The news of this outrage of President Lopez produced a great excitement in Buenos Ayres, whose Government had remained neutral, after successfully resisting the temptations of those who wished to involve it in the war." — (Dispatch of April 26. 1866.)

The same Mr. Thornton, in a communication bearing date May 6, 1866, ridicules the pretexts alleged by Lopez to invade the Argentine Republic. General McMahan, however, does not fear to invoke the authority of Mr. Thornton to prove the contrary.

Let us follow the General in his defense of Lopez, and see how he proves that the Dictator did not violate the law of nations.

He begins with a history, more or less mistaken, of the Uruguayan revolution and the alliance between General Flores and Brazil, denying that the Argentine Government had remained neutral in that question, and affirming that a secret plot existed between Brazil

and the Argentine Republic to destroy the Paraguayan nationality. These assertions, good General McMahon informs us, were communicated to him by Lopez himself! We cannot help admiring this credulity, for it betrays a candor seldom found among diplomats.

How explain, without neutrality, the efforts of the Argentine Government, made in union with the British Minister, in order to bring to an end the Uruguayan civil war through a peaceful mediation? If Brazil and the Argentine Republic were secretly united against Paraguay, why did the Argentine Government deny to the Brazilians the right to pass with their troops through its territory? Where is to be found, we shall not say the proof, but the least indication of the existence of such agreement before the invasion of Corrientes and the treaty of alliance? We leave to General McMahon the task of answering these questions; but we most respectfully beg him not to tell us what Lopez said to him, nor to go to search for his proofs among the specious pretexts alleged by the Dictator to disguise the suspicious movements of his troops on the frontier of the Argentine Republic, previous to his invading it.

In a communication dated February 9, 1866, the Argentine Government demanded an explanation of those movements, and made known its opinion in regard to the permission asked by the Paraguayan Government in order to cross with its troops through Argentine territory. It said: "His Excellency the President of the Argentine Republic, who has seen with the utmost regret the breaking out of a war between two friendly and neighboring Governments as are those of Brazil and Paraguay, has decided upon

observing the most strict neutrality. * * * In accordance with this principle it will respect the legitimate rights of the belligerents, etc." In the same dispatch, referring to its refusal to allow the passage of troops, it said: "The permission asked would therefore involve all the inconveniences that justify our refusal according to the doctrines and constant practice of all civilized peoples. Indeed, the permission once given to Paraguay, the same would have to be done with Brazil, and as a consequence, the neutral Argentine territory would become the seat of war." — (Note of Minister Elizalde to Minister Berges.) To a similar request made by Brazil a similar answer was given, showing in this, as in many other instances, how firmly resolved the Argentine Government was to remain strictly neutral in the struggle.

Asked if it is a question of life or death for the Paraguayans to resist the alliance to the last, General McMahon makes in his answer the most terrible mistakes. He says that he believes so, and to sustain his opinion he mentions the fact that the city of Corrientes, which he places in the Province of Entre-Rios, (as if we should say that Philadelphia is in the State of New York,) was the headquarters of Brazil during its war with Uruguay. On reading this we can scarcely believe our eyes. How could Brazil make its headquarters at Corrientes in order to invade Uruguay? Does General McMahon ignore that Brazil and Uruguay border each other in the frontier? Is he not aware of the fact that Corrientes is about nine hundred miles distant from the mouth of the River Plate, and consequently about nine hundred miles away from the natural water route

between Brazil and Uruguay, two hundred miles by land of the Brazilian frontier, and about three hundred from that of Uruguay ? Such is, however, the assertion of General McMahon, according to the geographical notions acquired by him in his conversations with Lopez!

General McMahon goes on making such a confusion of facts, circumstances, dates and places, that we are obliged to stop following him for a while in order to make a brief history of the alliance and its causes.

The Paraguayan Government, that since the times of Dr. Francia had been a military despotism, felt the necessity of extending its inland territory, it being geographically dependent on the Argentine Republic for its communication with the outside world. The province of Corrientes was the most coveted, on account of its being nearest to Paraguay, and by the facilities that it would afford for the further acquisition of Entre-Rios. Once in possession of these provinces, Paraguay would have settled the question of a direct communication with the ocean.

The intervention of Brazil in Uruguay served as a pretext for Lopez to carry out his father's plans, and with that object in view he sided against the Empire, invoking the equilibrium of the river Plate as his reason for thus acting. It was then that he and Brazil asked from the Argentine Government the permission to pass with their troops, and that this was denied to both.

Nothing else occurred to justify the invasion of

Corrientes, and it was thus that the Argentine Republic was obliged to give up its neutral policy and to make an alliance with Brazil and Uruguay against the invader. We have before us the dispatches exchanged between the Argentine and Paraguayan Governments, and we find nothing in regard to the supposed secret alliance against Paraguay. We advise General McMahon to read those documents, as well as many others concerning the war, which are of public notoriety, as we are quite sure that after reading them he will no longer trust the tyrant who has dared to make of him little less than a plaything.

According to General McMahon, and the information given to him *by Lopez*, (he does not mention any other,) the Dictator of Paraguay declared war to the Argentine Republic before attacking it, but the Argentine President kept the declaration a secret, with the view of making the aggression still more odious. But, how or when was that declaration made? How did it happen that the entire Argentine people, Mr. Thornton, Admiral Elliott, and in fact the whole world, never became aware, nor even suspected, the existence of that document? Let General McMahon answer these questions, but without relying on what *Lopez told him*. The General's account of the Treaty of Alliance is not only unjust, but in open hostility with historical truth. Let him prove, if he can, that a free government has not been established in Paraguay, elected by the people, and composed of men who, until a year ago, were fighting in Lopez's army. The allies have made war against the *Lopez dynasty*, and not the Paraguayan people. This has been invariably stated in

all public documents, and the brotherly affection with which the Paraguayan prisoners and refugees have been treated, together with the establishment of a free government in Asuncion, do not leave a shadow of doubt about the honesty of their intentions. The exclusion of Lopez is based upon the fact that 'he does not offer any guarantee for the observance of treaties of any kind. No nation in similar circumstances, seeing that its free institutions were continually threatened by an irresponsible tyrant, and after the unprovoked invasion, plunder and desolation of a large portion of its territory, would have acted differently. Peace with Lopez would be only an armistice during which he would be on the lookout for new pretexts for the consummation of his ambitious plans of conquest

The Argentine Republic is more interested than anybody else in the existence of a liberal Government in Paraguay. With Lopez such a Government was impossible, as he could not even accept the idea of it without committing political suicide. It was because the allies knew it that they promised not to lay down their arms until they had put an end to the dynasty of Lopez and their absolute rule in Paraguay. If the allies erred in this a thousand times more erred those who considered dangerous the establishment of the Mexican empire, the victory of Southern aristocracy, and a protectorate in Texas If ever General McMahan reads anything about Paraguayan history, we doubt not that the color will mount to his cheeks every time that he thinks of the time when he made himself the advocate of the tyrants of that most unfortunate country

Has General McMahan or anybody else ever

noticed anything like republican institutions in Paraguay? Does there exist any national representation? Is the power of the executive in any way restricted in that country? Is it not true that the people call Lopez the *supreme*, i.e. the master, the sovereign? During his residence in Paraguay, did the General become aware of the existence of a judicial power, of guarantees of any kind, liberty of the press, of reunion, of worship, in fact of anything? No, he surely never heard of the Paraguayan enjoying any of those precious rights of a free people. Paraguay was a convent under the rule of the Jesuits; it is a barrack under the despotism of Lopez.

We advise General McMahan to read the so called constitution of Paraguay, which he will find in the library of the State Department. He will by so doing gain a good deal of useful information. But the public has as good a right as General McMahan to know a little about that constitution, and we quote below the opinion of a noted supporter of Lopez, the well-known author of the many pamphlets in defense of the Paraguayan despot, published during the war, and distributed all over Europe and America. We need not say that at the time that Mr. Alberdi wrote this, he had not yet been won by Lopez:

“The constitution of Paraguay is the constitution of dictatorship, of the all-powerful presidency as a permanent institution. The dictatorship of Dr. Francia was not the best preparatory school for the representative republican system. It was thought that the new constitution would contain some liberal reforms, but this was not the case. It is more than the

first. The dictatorship is hidden behind a constitutional mask.

“Article one consecrates the liberal principle of the division of the different powers, declaring as an exclusive attribution of Congress the law-making power. But this amounts to nothing; when reading article five, we find that the authority of the President of the Republic is *extraordinary whenever* (according to his own judgment) *public order should require it*. The President is the exclusive judge of all the important legal cases (*causas reservadas*.) He raises armies, creates naval forces, and disposes of them *without responsibility of any kind*. He concludes treaties with the same irresponsibility. He appoints and removes the employees at his own will. He opens commercial ports. He has unrestricted control over the post, the roads, the education of the people, the finances and the police, without having to consult anybody nor wait for any approbation. He is the embodiment of all the other powers of the executive, with none of its responsibilities. His term lasts ten years, (Paraguay has had but three rulers during the last sixty years,) during which Congress meets only twice. The ordinary sessions take place every five years.”

Thus speaks Dr. Alberdi of the model constitution of Paraguay, and if Lopez admirers do not believe Alberdi, we don't know whom they will believe. No man has served Lopez so well, be it writing pamphlets and articles for the press or giving advice to the agents of the tyrant in Europe. Now, after this, does General McMahan, the soldier of a free nation, the citizen of the Great American Republic, believe that

freedom can prosper under such a constitution? Can the ruler of a people thus constituted be the champion of the republican principle? And against whom? Against the Argentine Republic, whose constitution, whose laws and even whose school teachers are imported from the United States? Against the Argentine Republic, that has fought for its freedom and that of its neighbors, shedding the blood of its best sons to make their sister republics independent? The Argentine Republic, that went to war with Brazil when it showed signs of attempting to annex a neighboring republic, (Uruguay) and did not lay down its arms until the Empire was forced to give up its ambitious plans? Oh, General McMahan! There are things that cannot be said with impunity! If you ever again go to the River Plate, try to be only just, and you will render a great service to humanity and to yourself if you have the courage of retracting your words of today. Mutual accusation, inquisitorial system, these are the institutions of Paraguay. In Lopez's hands are the life, the, fortune and the honor of the families, and he gives the example of immorality, living publicly in concubinage with a married woman. The assertions to the contrary of General McMahan are nothing against what has been said by so many travelers and diplomats, such as Captain Page, Beck Bernard, Arcos, and Rev. Dr. Eizaguirre among the first; Thornton, Cerrutti and Washburn among the last. The declarations of all the Paraguayan officers taken during the war by the allies, all of which have been published, do not leave a shadow of doubt about the truth of what we have said, and they tell a tale quite different from that of General McMahan.

Treating of the preparations of Paraguay for the war, General McMahon states, that according to what Lopez told him, he was but poorly prepared for it, having armed his troops with the arms captured from the allies at Corrientes. This scarcely needs any refutation, and we shall confine ourselves to give a few extracts of declarations made by some of the principal officers of Lopez's army, who have fallen into the hands of the allies. Captain Adolfo Saguier says: "At the beginning of the war the Paraguayan army counted fifty thousand men in the three branches of the service, all of the line, and good men, well drilled and passably organized." Lieutenant Colonel Lucas Carrillo, who commanded at Angostura, says: "The army at the beginning of the war was composed of fifty-six thousand men, those in the navy included. We had a battery of six rifled guns, and some three hundred guns of other descriptions, among them one of the calibre known as one hundred and fifty and another of one hundred and twenty." Colonel Francisco Martinez, Chief of Humaita, says: "That when the war began, the Paraguayan army had from fifty to sixty thousand men in its ranks "

Now, the population of Paraguay never exceeded 800,000; we leave to the reader to decide whether or not the Dictator was prepared for war. In regard to arms, Lopez never made a secret of his enormous purchase in Europe of warlike materials. Everybody knows besides, and we could give the names of some of them, that Lopez had secured in Europe the services of many engineers, surgeons and officers for the army and navy, long before the war

broke out. That story about Lopez arming his men at Corrientes, and the several battle-fields, can be only taken as a joke, for not only was there never a deposit of arms there previous to the war, but at the time of its capture by the Paraguayans not a company of soldiers was there to garrison the place. He could not have taken them in any battle-field, for he never was master of any. Curupaity has been the only victory gained by Lopez during the war, and that was not a battle, but an unsuccessful attack upon very strong entrenchments, in which the allies retired in good order. Not a single man of the enemy daring to come out after the repulse. When the story of Lopez armament reaches the shores of the River Plate, the general exclamation will be: *Risum teneatis!*

The Paraguayan troops seen by General McMahan are all that is left of a people sacrificed to the ambition of a cruel despot, and not the powerful army on which Lopez depended for the execution of his ambitious plans. Those poor, wretched fellows that surround the tyrant to-day, and who do not dare leave him, because they still fear him, are not those strong sixty thousand men with which he attempted the conquest of the republics of the River Plate, to found in them the second South American Empire. And a most glorious Empire it would have been, with Indians and white and black slaves as subjects, and Lopez as Emperor! Did General McMahan pay a visit to the Public Museum of Buenos Ayres during his stay in that city? It would be a pity if he had not, because there he would have learned a good lesson while looking at the splendid crown that was to have covered Lopez's head, and is now one of the most beautiful attractions of that

rich institution.

The manner in which General McMahon tries to excuse the crimes of Lopez is surprising for the innocence that it betrays. Speaking of the six hundred persons killed by order of the dictator, and whose names are put down in the papers lately taken by the allies, he says that Lopez having had one hundred and twenty thousand men under his command, he cannot be blamed for the execution of that number during the four years of the war, and for the crime of desertion. But does General McMahon ignore that those six hundred names represent all that was most respectable in Paraguay? Does he ignore that similar documents containing the names of over two thousand victims have been found at Curupaity, Lomas, Valentines, and other encampments? The journal of the Paraguayan General Resquin, which •the General seems to have consulted but not understood, shows that from the first of May until the fourteenth of December, (eight months, and not four years,) six hundred and five persons were executed; their names, employment, nationality, and kind of death being there specified. If General Resquin is not a good authority on the matter we doubt whether there can be found a better one. Certainly not General McMahon.

General McMahon has not read the list of the victims, because if he had he would have seen that few of them could have been, we shall not say convicted, but not even accused of the crime of desertion. Indeed, was there any probability of being deserters, the Charge d'Affaires of Uruguay, ex-Minister Carreras, the Uruguayan Consul, the Charge d'Affaires of Bolivia,

the Portuguese Consul, Mr. Leite Pereira, and the Vice Consul of the same nation, the Judges Garcete, Ortiz, Basaras, Ojeda, Pelara, Nunez, Burgos, Durante and Peres, the commanders of Ita, Yaguaron, Paraguari, Capegua, Ibitimi, Villa Rica, Casa-apa, Yuti, Villa del Rosario, Villa de San Pedro, and two of the capital ; the custom officers Bedoya, Gonzales, Ibarra, Milleres, Urbietta, Molinas, Lion, Uandia, and many others? How could have been deserters the bishop, the presbyters Bogado, Corbalan, Servin, Arce, Basan, Baldovino, Barrrios, Falavera, Patino, Rodriguez, Narvaez, Benitez, Salduondo, and the ladies Maria I. De Eguzquiza, Dolores Recalde, and Juliana N. de Martinez, all of them killed or tortured by the tyrant ?

All these crimes and many others weigh upon the head of Lopez, and nothing can blot out the innocent blood with which his hands are stained. Master of the destinies of a people whose happiness it would have been exceedingly easy for him to accomplish, he has sacrificed it to his ambition, and has martyriized and ruined it. In his thirst for blood he invented a conspiracy against himself, in which he complicated his own mother, the American Minister, and all the Members of his Legation, almost all the foreign consuls, his brother Benigno, his brother-in-law, General Barrios, Mr. Bedoya, Secretary of the Treasury, the Bishop, the Secretary of State, Mr. Berjes, and hundreds of other persons belonging to the most distinguished class in Paraguay. All of these Lopez accused of treason, and all, with the exception of Minister Washburn, were incarcerated and tortured. Does General McMahan know how many of these

persons are living at present? He ought to know, and we will thank him for their names, as we do not know of any others besides Lopez's mother, Mr. Bliss, and Mr. Masterman.

One word more in regard to this supposed conspiracy. Did it really exist, or was it only an invention of Lopez? If the first, we must confess that the fact that among the conspirators were his mother and brothers, the men in whom he had most confidence, the clergy, and almost all the members of the diplomatic and consular corps, speaks *very highly* as to the character of the dictator if the second was the case, well, then, everyone must acknowledge that Lopez has been the murderer of six hundred innocent persons. Has Gen. Mc Mahon anything to answer to this?

In spite of the self-confidence with which the General gives his opinions in regard to Lopez, the war, etc., it seems as if his conscience were not very quiet. "I am afraid," he says, "our Minister to the Argentine Republic, Mr. Kirk, has so far forgotten himself as to assist in the effort to ruin my credit with my Government, which began there and has followed line here." Why that fear of General McMahan? We cannot explain it otherwise than by the fact that Mr. Kirk having resided five years in the River Plate, and being well posted in the affairs of those countries, he may write to his Government some truths that will not meet with the approbation of the General. We beg the General's pardon if we are mistaken, but we cannot, as we have said before, find another explanation for his fears as to what Mr. Kirk will say in the future.

We finish our task, hoping that our statements will throw some light on this Paraguayan question. We thought that the word of somebody who knew the truth about those countries and their questions, and who could give reliable proof in support of his assertions, would be of great weight in the controversy. Whether we have succeeded, the reader and General McMahan will judge for themselves. If more proofs and documents are needed, we are ready to furnish them at any time, and we hope then as well as now our assertions will weigh more than the unfounded and arbitrary statements of Lopez's admirers, who are trying hard to excite the feelings of the American nation against peoples whose history is but imperfectly known. Their malicious efforts to deceive public opinion, representing the war as between monarchy and republicanism, (omitting of course the fact that Paraguay is a republic only in name, and that the two allied republics are more interested in the freedom of Paraguay than the admirers of Lopez) will at the end be unsuccessful. A day will come when General McMahan and those who sympathize with his ideas will reflect upon the responsibility they have assumed in giving their moral support to the cause of despotism on the River Plate, and upon the great mistake they made when they believed in Lopez's honesty, and that he was fighting for the cause of republicanism.