

Our Commercial Relations with  
Spanish America.

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In speaking of Spanish America I shall refer to Mexico, Central America and all of South America, notwithstanding there are places in this vast area which the Spaniards never firmly held and where the Spanish language is not now spoken.

The relation which exists between the United States of America and Spanish America is, in many respects, very intimate. They form most of the land surface of one of the two great divisions of the earth, viz., the Western Hemisphere, and are connected by a single chain of mountains extending north and south through the entire territory, thus forming a single backbone for the United States of America and Spanish America.

From a historical standpoint they are also intimately connected. They both date their discovery from 1492 when Columbus landed at San Salvador. After that they were both explored and occupied by Europeans and became subject to European rule.

But here appears a difference. The



United States of America was occupied mainly by an energetic, industrious people, leaving an oppressive government to seek for themselves a new home. Although they were under the dominion of Great Britain for more than a century and a half, they always enjoyed more or less of political freedom, and were allowed, to a limited extent, all the rights of Englishmen.

In contrast to this we find Spanish America occupied by roving adventurers in quest of gold. They never intended to stay in the country any longer than was necessary to accumulate a large fortune. The people that were found occupying the land were, in most cases, reduced to slavery.

The climate also causes a great difference in the disposition of the people of the different countries. The United States of America has a very invigorating, temperate climate; while that of Spanish America, being a warm tropical climate, does not conduce to vigorous efforts.



But that which kept Spanish America in a state of half civilization more than anything else was the domineering rule of Spain. The American policy of the Spanish government has no parallel in history. "To drain the American colonies of their wealth and draw it to Spain was the whole object of its legislation; and its indifference to American prosperity was shown by its prohibitive system of trade. Articles of necessity and luxury called for by the Americans had to be brought exclusively from Spain, and trading with foreigners was made a heinous offense."

It is only within the last century that the countries of Spanish America have thrown off the yoke of their foreign rulers, and began to live and think for themselves.

The United States of America from its earliest settlement has kept pace with the advance of civilization, and today stands in the front rank of the nations of the world.

The Spanish American countries, on



the other hand, may be said to be just putting on the cloak of civilization preparatory to taking a stand among the higher civilized nations. Although late in starting and laboring under many difficulties, their progress has been very rapid.

One great similarity between these nations at present is their republican form of government. The United States was the first to set the example, and the countries of Spanish America have followed more or less closely, until now they all have a republican government of some kind.

These relations and the relative position of the countries would naturally draw these nations together in the commercial part of their government it would seem. But how has it been?

Instead of the exports of Spanish America coming to the United States, the most of them have gone to Europe; and the supplies imported into Spanish America, instead of going from this country, have been furnished mostly by



European nations.

To show to what extent this is true we take the following figures from a table prepared by Secretary of State James S. Blaine: Of \$58,635,182 worth of imports into Brazil for one year, the United States furnished only \$5,430,532 worth, while the remainder, \$53,204,650 worth, was furnished by European nations. From this we see that the United States furnished less than eleven per cent of the whole amount.

What is the cause of this lack of commerce between the United States and Spanish America? Is it the fault of the latter? The southern countries, especially Brazil, have offered many inducements to trade, not only to the United States, but to the whole world.

The cause must be looked for in our own country. But here it can easily be found when it is known that we allow most of our own foreign trade to be carried on by foreign vessels; that we have but few good merchantmen of our own. We cannot expect to



gain a very large trade in any foreign market until we can have it carried on by citizens of our own country.

One great obstacle to commerce between this country and Spanish America has been the high tariffs charged by each country on the products of the other, and also the export duties charged by some of the Spanish American countries.

The greatest part of the South American trade of the United States is with Brazil, which furnishes us nearly all of our coffee. This coffee trade became so important that the United States removed the tariff from coffee, and it was added to the free list.

But this had hardly been done when the Brazillian government placed an export duty on coffee large enough to counterbalance the tariff removed by this government. For the same reason the duty was removed from rubber and hides.

Within the last few years greater attention has been paid to



these Southern countries by the United States, and our trade with them has greatly increased.

With a view to further advancing this trade, the last session of congress, through the efforts of Secretary Blaine, passed a bill by which the President is empowered to make reciprocity treaties with foreign countries under which we will admit certain foreign products free of duty or with the duty greatly reduced on condition that some of the products of the United States receive like favor from the country with which the treaty is made. It is confidently expected that this will be the means of greatly increasing commercial intercourse between the United States and the Spanish American countries.

Under this provision a treaty has already been made with Brazil by which we continue to admit their Coffee, rubber and hides free while their sugar and molasses, on which they were paying a duty, are now added to the free



list. In return for this Brazil has put over twenty-five of our products, including our most important agricultural and manufactured articles, on the free list, and on other articles it has reduced the rate of duty twenty five per cent.

This treaty has been so recent that it is impossible to tell how it will affect our commerce with Brazil. But it has caused such a change in our sugar trade as to induce Spain to sue for a treaty of reciprocity so as to put the Cuba sugar on the same competitive basis as that of Brazil.

Everything now points toward reciprocity with all of Spanish America, and a greatly increased trade with these countries.

A. O. Wright, '91.