

CENTRAL AMERICA.

One of the points in dispute between England and the United States, viz. the enlistment question, is now amicably settled. The Central American question is still the subject of negotiation and as many of our readers are probably unacquainted with the grave differences existing between the two nations on this subject, we publish below, from an influential English periodical, a concise history of them to the present time.

The Central American question has two branches:

- 1. The Protectorate of the Mosquitoes; 2. The sovereignty of the Bay Islands.

These questions, though distinctly stated, will, however, be found so blended together, that it is impossible to consider them separately.

The Mosquito coast stretches along a large proportion of the sea-board of Central America. This extensive territory is—we cannot say occupied—but scantily inhabited by a tribe of savage Indians, who have been for many years diminishing, and are now, it is alleged, reduced to some three or four thousand souls. The connexion of Great Britain with this part of the world is to be referred to the commercial rivalry with Spain, which involved us in repeated warfare with that country during the last century. The intrusion of British enterprise upon the Spanish settlements in America had been the constant theme of angry complaint by the Court of Madrid; and by the Treaty of 1763, confirmed by that of 1786, Great Britain renounced all claim to any part of this particular territory. But by an article in the former treaty, the Catholic King expressly stipulated, that he would not exercise "any act of severity against the Mosquito Indians, on account of their former connexion and friendly relations with the English settlers." Such seems to have been the origin of the Protectorate which the English Government have claimed and occasionally exercised over these people ever since. Now the meaning of this word "Protectorate" is sufficiently obvious. When a great and civilized empire assumes such a relation with a scattered tribe of miserable savages, it is virtually that of absolute sovereignty. It is all very well for our Government to employ the decorous language of diplomacy upon such a point, and to assert "That her Majesty had never held any possessions whatever in the Mosquito country" (Lord Clarendon to Mr. Buchanan, 2d May, 1850); but as Lord J. Russell in one of his despatches, addressed to Mr. Crampton, expresses it,—"Greytown was virtually a possession, and Mosquito a dependency of Great Britain."

The pretensions of this country, though distinctly and repeatedly brought to the notice of the Government of the United States, attracted little attention until the discovery of gold in California, and the immediate importance of establishing inter-oceanic communication by means of the Isthmus of Panama, made the affair of Central America of paramount importance. In 1849, accordingly, the Cabinet of Washington for the first time addressed a serious inquiry to that of her Majesty upon this question. The formation of a ship canal across Panama, which had long been projected, was attended with considerations of a grave political character. Such an undertaking as the junction of the two great seas which were separated by the continent of the New World, was not to be placed under the control either of England or of America, but should be secured for the benefit of the whole civilized race. Nothing therefore could have been more reasonable and opportune, than the question put by the American Minister to our Government in 1849. The question was, "Would her Majesty's Government join with the United States in guaranteeing the neutrality of a ship canal, railway, or other communication between the two oceans to be open to the world, and common to all nations?" To this note, Lord Palmerston, then Foreign Secretary, replied in the most frank and unequivocal terms, cordially recognizing the full spirit and meaning of the question, and tendering the good offices of his Government to promote such an undertaking, and to place it beyond the reach of any international dispute that might hereafter arise and otherwise interrupt the entire freedom to which a cosmopolitan work should be devoted. His lordship, however, maintained silence with respect to another question which had been appended to Mr. Abbott Lawrence's note, viz. Whether the British Government intended to occupy or colonize Nicaragua, Costa Rica, the Mosquito Coast so called, or any part of Central America?

It was not to be expected, that the United States could allow the question to remain in this ambiguous condition; and indeed Lord Clarendon, in his answer to Mr. Buchanan, above referred to, clearly stated the reasons which rendered it necessary, that the position of Great Britain with regard to the future commerce of those seas should be distinctly ascertained.

This article would expand the dimensions of a Blue-Book, were we to follow the different steps of the negotiation, which ensued, and which terminated in the famous Clayton-Bulwer treaty of the following year. This Convention seems to have been studiously framed for the encouragement of the vast enterprises of which the high contracting Powers so earnestly desired the accomplishment; and they seemed desirous to give, not only to each other, but to all the world, the most emphatic assurance of their sincerity and good faith. But the document contained what lawyers call a latent ambiguity, which has not only, we fear, frustrated its main design, but has brought the contracting parties themselves to the brink of a mortal quarrel.

By the first article it was agreed, that neither party should ever "occupy, fortify, or assume or exercise any dominion over Nicaragua, Costa Rica, the Mosquito Coast, or any part of Central America."

A question almost immediately arose as to the meaning of this stipulation. The Government of the United States was, as we have stated, fully informed as to the relations which had long subsisted between the British Government and the Mosquito people: nevertheless, they interpreted the treaty as a renunciation by both parties of any interference in the affairs of Central America. And it is to be observed, that Lord Palmerston himself, in a letter to Sir H. Bulwer, a few days after the treaty had been signed, and before any question had arisen, put the same construction upon it. Adverting to the obligation which Great Britain had incurred to protect the Mosquito people, his lordship proposed, that that object should be secured by means of a treaty between Mosquito and the neighbouring States, and that the United States should co-operate with Great Britain in effecting such an arrangement. And in pointing out the necessity of a special provision for the safe government of Greytown, as being one of the outlets of the proposed inter-oceanic communication, his lordship adds, "That the spirit and meaning of the Convention which you have signed with Mr. Clayton is, that Greytown should not, either directly or indirectly, be under the control either of Great Britain or the United States."

We agree with Lord Palmerston that such are the spirit and meaning of the Convention, but such is certainly not its literal construction; and unfortunately as we think, our Government have shown a disposition to adopt the literal construction, instead of the spirit and meaning, of the agreement.

What, then, is the literal construction of the treaty? We think it is this. Great Britain stipulates that she will not occupy, fortify, colonize, assume or exercise dominion over any part of the territories named. Now it is certain, that she stood in neither of the relations so defined towards Mosquito. Her position was that of a Protectorate; a term of such ambiguous and elastic signification as may virtually mean either of them, or comprehend them all. The Protectorate exercised by the British over this country was necessarily that of supreme dictation. The people who were to be protected required also to be ruled; they had nothing which a civilized State could recognize as a government. Their king was a form—a phantom; the real governor of the Mosquitoes was the British consul at Bluefields.

It is very well for us to maintain that this power would never be abused to purposes inconsistent with the object of the treaty. We may and do believe so; but we have no right to expect the same amount of confidence from a rival State. History tells us, indeed, that such confidence would be mere credulity. The Americans said we were bound to withdraw altogether from the Mosquito coast; and if the point had rested merely on the interpretation of the treaty, though that interpretation might technically be in our favour, we should have had no hesitation in saying that Great Britain would have acted an unworthy part in relying upon such a quibble.

But unfortunately for the United States, their Government has expressly assented to the construction which we put upon the first Article. The reader must always bear in mind that the States entered into the Convention with full knowledge of the facts. They knew that we assumed and exercised a Protectorate over the Mosquitoes. They knew that we had a settlement in Central America. Before the treaty was ratified, the latter point was specially brought to the notice of the American plenipotentiary by the British Minister, in pursuance of instructions from his Government. And what is the answer of Mr. Clayton, the American Secretary of State who had negotiated the treaty? In his formal reply to Sir H. Bulwer, he uses these words, which, as words are things in this controversy, we transcribe verbatim—"The language of Article 1 of the convention concluded on the 19th day of April last between the United States and Great Britain, describing the country not to be occupied, &c., by either of the parties was, you know, twice approved by your Government; and it was neither undisturbed by them, nor either of us (the negotiations), to include the British Honduras, commonly called British Honduras, as distinct from the State of Honduras, nor the small islands in the neighbourhood of that settlement, which may be known as its dependencies. To this settlement, and these islands, the treaty was negotiated, was not intended by either of us to apply. The title to them it is now, and has been my intention throughout the whole negotiation, to leave, as the treaty leaves it, without denying, affirming, or in any way meddling with the same, just as it stood previously." Mr. Clayton to Sir H. Bulwer, July 4, 1850.

This brings us to the question, as to the limits of Central America, because the engagement into which Great Britain has entered, is not to occupy, &c., any part of that territory. Do British Honduras and its dependencies form part of Central America? If so, it is clear, that the terms of the Treaty must be qualified and explained by Mr. Clayton's letter. A doubt on the point there certainly must have been; otherwise, wherefore the necessity of requiring from Mr. Clayton such an explicit declaration? But the whole tenor of the correspondence proves that the government of the United States always considered British Honduras and the adjacent islands to form part, politically as well as geographically, of Central America. If our space permitted, we could cite numerous passages in support of this allegation; but it is perhaps sufficient to mention that the elaborate paper addressed by Mr. Buchanan to the British Government, in which he states at length and with great ability the whole case of his government, is founded on the assumption, that Central America does comprise all the territory, our occupation of which was expressly recognised by the American Minister, and by the Chairman of the Committee of Foreign Relations of the American Senate.

But if it is established, that our engagement as to the occupation of any part of Central America is to be understood in a qualified sense, as regards British Honduras and the islands adjoining, a similar reservation necessarily applies to our relations (not describes by any of the terms employed) with the Mosquito coast, which is unquestionably a part of Central America.

The truth really is, that the treaty is to be construed in a prospective and not in a retrospective sense. It precludes us from acquiring territory or influence in a certain quarter of the globe, but it does not oblige us to abandon the territory or influence which we possessed at the date of the treaty.

The Americans maintain, that our continued occupation, in any sense, of any part of this continent and its dependencies, is breach of our contract. We have plainly shown, that they must maintain this position consistently with their own express declaration to the contrary.

On the other hand we have ourselves admitted, not indeed in the same formal manner, but in official correspondence which is now published to the world, "that the spirit and meaning of the Convention is, that we should neither directly nor indirectly exercise any control over Greytown"—i. e. Mosquito, and if Mosquito, the rest of Central America, since there is no language in the Convention which applies to one part of the continent more than another. What, then, is the practical solution of this difficulty?

We have no right to complain, as we have already said, that the United States should regard with jealousy our occupation or influence over any part of a coast which is probably soon destined to assume such paramount importance to the commerce of the world. We really have no interest in maintaining our disputed title to this remote soil, or in continuing our obnoxious influence, unless our honour is concerned. And this indeed is now the only point in controversy. America must withdraw some of her assertions and pretensions, alike untenable and offensive, before an amicable settlement of the question can be allowed. Some of the statements contained in Lord Clarendon's reply to the paper drawn up by Mr. Buchanan must also be modified. Mr. Buchanan, in tracing the history of our connexion with the Mosquito coast, seeks to fix us with rapacity and usurpation. This is not an argument at all adapted to diplomacy. No nation was ever yet convinced of the guilt of its conquests by the reasoning of a rival. Another position advanced by the American ambassador is in the highest degree arrogant. It is what is called the Monroe doctrine, and is contained in a message which that President ever communicated to Congress. "The American continent," says that "wise and discreet President," as Mr. Buchanan styles him, "by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintained, are henceforth not to be considered subjects for future colonization by any European power." And this doctrine, our Government is officially informed, "has received the public and official sanction of subsequent Presidents, as well as of a large majority of the American people." This doctrine, be it observed, is applied to the southern continent, where the United States exercise no dominion; and it is addressed to a power which possesses extensive and flourishing colonies bordering upon the territory of the Union. We cannot but consider such language unmanly at least, if not menacing. Lord Clarendon's reply is in better taste, certainly, but not much more felicitous, we think, in its choice and management of topics. His lordship begins by declining to argue with the American Minister the right of Great Britain to interfere in the Government of the Mosquito country, and immediately proceeds to explain and defend that assumption. We think that the defence might as well have been omitted, especially as it is not very successful. Our vindication of the right of obligation to maintain a handful of savages in a country from which they would have been displaced by the ordinary progress of civilization, is referred to a remote and somewhat doubtful origin; and whatever may be the humanity or the policy of defending the rights of native barbarians against civilized settlers, it certainly is rather

a new principle for us to advance. Our Minister is still less happy, we think, when he proceeds to draw a distinction between protection and occupation, attributing to the former a disinterested, generous character which may, for aught we know, belong to it in theory, but which, as far as we are aware, has never distinguished it in practice. That one grave statesman should endeavour to persuade another grave statesman that protection extended by a strong Power to a weak meant nothing more than unsophisticated benevolence, is a mere waste of diplomacy. Such a pretension, we fear, has little chance of being credited in this age of the world; and if we are to reconcile the American Government to the continuance of our present relations with the Mosquito country, we must resort to arguments of a more practical character. On a careful perusal of the two important papers in which the case on the part of Great Britain and the United States respectively is fully stated, we are not surprised, that Mr. Buchanan should declare the result to be "that the two Governments entertained opinions widely different in regard to the true effect and meaning of the convention."

CIRCASSIAN SLAVE TRADE IN TURKEY. There has been lately an unusually large number of Circassians going about the streets of Constantinople. They are here as slave-dealers, charged with the disposal of the numerous parcels of Circassian girls that have been for some time pouring into this market. Perceiving that when the Russians shall have re-occupied the coast of the Caucasus this traffic in white slaves will be over the Circassian dealers have redoubled their efforts ever since the commencement of the peace conference to introduce into Turkey the greatest possible number of women while the opportunity of doing so lasted. They have been so successful, notwithstanding the prohibition of the trade by the Porte, and the presence of so many of her Majesty's ships in the Black Sea, that never, perhaps, at any other former period was white human flesh so cheap as it is at this moment. There is an absolute glut in the market, and dealers are obliged to throw away their goods, owing to the extent of the supply, which in many instances, has been brought by steam under the British flag. In former times a "good middling" Circassian girl was thought very cheap at £100, but at the present moment the same description of goods may be had for £5. In fact, the creatures are eating their heads off, and must be disposed of at any sacrifice, however alarming. Independently of all political, humane, and Christian objections to this abominable state of things there are several practical ones which have even forced themselves on the attention of the Turks. With low prices a low class of purchasers come into market. Formerly a Circassian slave girl was pretty sure of being bought into a good family, where not only good treatment, but often rank and fortune awaited her, but at present low rates she may be taken by any huxter, who never thought of keeping a slave before. Another evil is, that the temptation to possess a Circassian girl at such low prices is so great in the minds of the Turks that many who cannot afford to keep several slaves have been sending their blacks to market in order to make room for a newly-purchased white girl. The consequence is, that numbers of black women after being as many as eight or ten years in the same hands, have lately been consigned to the broker for disposal not a few of these wretched creatures are in a state quite unfit for being sold.

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The New Prussian Gazette has a communication from Vienna of the 24th, which states that "the large mustachios of Victor Emanuel have been prohibited at Milan." Lord John Russell has left town to join Lady Russell and family at Antwerp, whence the noble lord and lady purpose going to Switzerland and ultimately to Italy. His lordship has broken up his domestic establishment, and, as before mentioned, contemplates a stay of some duration abroad.