

THE HEAD OF THE CUBAN JUNTA TRIES TO
JUSTIFY THE KILLING OF THE
SPANISH OFFICER.

To the Editor of The Tribune.

Sir: The death of Colonel Ruiz did not occur, as the Spanish have put it, while he was negotiating as a peace messenger under a flag of truce. Again and again have the Cubans promulgated the law that all who should come to them with peace propositions not based on the independence of Cuba should be treated as spies and dealt with accordingly. Colonel Ruiz not only knew of the existence of the law, but, according to the Spanish accounts, was personally warned as to his fate. General Blanco and Secretary-General Congosto, too, were well aware of the existence of the decree. Nevertheless these latter took advantage of the unfortunate Quixotism of Colonel Ruiz, and sent him to the Cuban lines. The blood of Colonel Ruiz is not on the hands of the Cubans, but upon the heads of Blanco and Congosto, who sent him to his fate.

If the penalty of the law had not been carried into effect, doubtless Spain would have taken advantage of the fact to show that the Cubans were not in earnest in their rejection of autonomy, absolutely, but were willing to listen to arguments. This decree was not promulgated because the Cubans are afraid of disaffection in their ranks, but because it is known that innumerable commissioners would otherwise be sent, and on their return make false statements, encouraging the belief that peace might be established on a basis other than independence. Such statements would only serve the interests of Spain in gaining time, with the resulting death of thousands, owing to the useless prolongation of the war. Besides, the Cubans are advised that the Spanish are seeking to enter the insurgent lines with the purpose of assassinating the more important leaders. Documentary proof of this fact is in our hands, and we are the more cautious when we remember that in 1879 General Blanco authorized General Polavieja in Santiago, Cuba, to execute as many unarmed Cubans as the latter thought necessary as an example. It is somewhat remarkable that with the first news of the death of Colonel Ruiz came the announcement of the killing by the Spanish of over forty sick and wounded Cubans found in a hospital, and not a voice was raised in protest thereat. The shooting of Cuban prisoners by the score passed almost without comment; the thousands of wounded Cuban soldiers slain in hospitals attract but little notice, it is so common.

According to all the laws of civilized warfare the Cubans from the beginning had the right to retaliate in kind, but they never have done so. On the contrary, all prisoners taken by them were set at liberty and the wounded attended to. We are denied by the entire world a status as belligerents, and might therefore claim that we have not the obligations to conduct the war as belligerents, but we do not intend to take this stand, either. The conditions obtaining in Cuba and the character of the Spanish demand, however, that we take the necessary measures speedily to terminate the war by convincing the world that independence alone can satisfy us. We accordingly issue a decree and solemnly warn Spain of its enactment. If, despite this warning, they persuade a man to be rash enough to come to us to treat on the basis of autonomy we must either acknowledge that our laws are made only to be broken or be compelled by a painful duty to carry it into effect. It is a question of the lives of one or two rash men or of the lives of thousands of patriotic Cubans.

T. ESTRADA PALMA.