

The Philippine Question.

· FROM A FILIPINO POINT OF VIEW.

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IN submitting the following statement to the people of the United States I have no desire or intention of seeking to interfere in American politics. I cannot claim the honor of belonging to that enviable company of foreigners who possess the genius which enables them to attend to every one's business but their own. On the con-

trary, I am of opinion that the American people are eminently capable of managing their own affairs. But inasmuch as the Philippine question intimately concerns a people who are not American citizens; as it possesses a humanitarian aspect and is therefore, in a sense, super-political; and inasmuch as the Administration's Philippine

policy has been urged with an eloquence which I can never hope to equal, I may be pardoned if I give a dispassionate statement of the case from a Filipino point of view, leaving the American people to form their own conclusions and to judge on which side lies the balance of truth and justice.

The history of the Philippines, or that part of the history which is immediately germane, may be told in a few sentences. Some three hundred years ago the people of the Philippines suffered *material* conquest at the hands of Spain, but there was never a *moral* submission. The desire for national liberty lived in the hearts of the people in spite of the most cruel oppression. The spirit of rebellion against the usurper had never been quelled. Ever and anon it took active form, and culminated in the insurrection led by Aguinaldo in 1896. The result of that insurrection was an agreement entered into between the insurgent leaders and the Spanish authorities in Manila, providing that certain reforms were to be granted, and that the Filipinos were to have adequate representation in the Spanish Cortes. As a guarantee of good faith the Spanish authorities agreed to deposit with the insurgent leaders a sum of \$800,000. This sum, in the event of Spain failing to keep her compact, was to be used for the repurchase of arms and munitions of war. But if Spain acted in good faith the money was to be invested for the benefit and education of the children of those insurgents who had fallen in the insurrection. The first instalment of \$400,000 was duly paid. But as soon as the insurgent leaders had, according to agreement, taken up their residence in Hong Kong, Spain, with characteristic *mala fides*, repudiated the whole of the agreement.

It was at this juncture that the Nelson of America entered Manila Bay. The Filipinos promptly joined forces with those of the United States and rendered all assistance in their power against the common foe. This assistance to American arms, *whatever its value may have been*, was given with a cheerfulness born of faith in the righteousness of the American people; upon whom we looked as our friends and deliverers. The Filipinos never dreamed that a nation whose first and guiding principle is (or was!) that "All

just powers of government are derived from the consent of the governed," would ever seek to thrust its sovereign will upon an unwilling people. We had received satisfactory assurances from responsible servants of the United States that *whatever rights* America might claim, in lieu of invaluable services to our people, those rights would not be incompatible with our liberty and independence. These assurances were tacitly confirmed in the acceptance, by Admiral Dewey and others, of our assistance against Spain, for we could not believe that America would ever turn its back upon an ally and comrade in arms. But further and, as we thought, final confirmation of these assurances was provided in the explicit statement of President McKinley when he declared, in his Message to Congress, that "formidable annexation [of Spanish possessions] cannot be thought of." Accepting that declaration as practically a "Self-denying ordinance" on the part of the United States, and with the above mentioned assurances, explicit and implicit, we felt we had nothing to fear in joining forces with a nation which itself had passed through the struggle for liberty and national life.

Can it be believed? We now find ourselves at war with that nation!

Before proceeding to inquire into the reason for this war, it may be prudent to disclose a fact which will enable the people of America to judge as to who were primarily responsible for the outbreak of hostilities.

President McKinley, in his recent speech at Fargo, declared that: "We did not go to war until every effort at peace was exhausted." I disclaim all intention of disrespect to the person and high office of the President when I say I join issue with him on that statement. What was the "every effort at peace?" The President himself tells us. When divested of rhetoric it amounts simply to an instruction to the United States troops not to commence hostilities. Such an instruction was surely a mere elementary, commonplace duty on the part of the United States Administration—a duty which can hardly be regarded in itself as a strenuous effort to preserve peace. But there was one thing within the power of the Administration to do, which was not done.

but which would have had an incalculable influence in preserving peace. I am prepared to bear all just censure for adopting the unusual course of here quoting part of an official letter which has not yet been made public by the United States authorities. Had the President refrained from the declaration that "every effort to preserve peace was exhausted," I should gladly have waited until a request had been made in Congress for the production of this document. But under the circumstances the quotation is justified, and seems to me to be due in common fairness to the Filipinos, as showing that we were as anxious for the preservation of peace as were those in America who claim the same merit. The letter in question was addressed by the late Filipino representative, when in Washington, to the Secretary of State, and bears the date 24th of January, 1899, just eleven days before the outbreak of hostilities in the Philippines:

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"I ventured [in a former letter] to call your attention to the fact that in the present strained position at Manila, the impetuous action of a Filipino or the over zeal of an American soldier might create a condition resulting in grievous loss of life, and for this reason I particularly urged upon you the necessity of early and frank communication between the representatives of the two countries. . . . The conditions have not essentially changed since the writing of my former letter . . . and the urgency then pointed out, I respectfully submit, still exists even in an accentuated degree. . . . There are at the present time, as we are informed, approximately twenty thousand armed and disciplined American troops in the city of Manila and vicinity, controlling a population of about three hundred thousand. A number of war vessels are stationed in the harbor, and many other American men-of-war and transports are to be found within the limits of the Philippine archipelago. . . . Despite the existence of these enormous forces within an extremely circumscribed area, we are informed through the public prints that other vessels of war have been ordered from distant parts of the globe to reinforce those now among the islands in question; while but a few days ago a transport sailed from New York City carrying about two thousand soldiers and having Manila as its destination; and, as we are further informed, regiments of troops are under orders to proceed by way of San Francisco to the Philippines. The public prints

inform us that an attack upon the Philippine Islands is contemplated; that the islands are to be taken in detail, the smaller ones first, the larger ones blockaded, so that they may not assist those first attacked.

"It is naturally the impression of my Government and people that these warlike preparations indicate existing or immediate military operations in the Orient, and they readily conceive that it must be contemplated that such operations are to be leveled at the existing government of the Philippine Islands.

"As the representative of the Philippine government, I hesitate to give adhesion to this idea, for I cannot believe that there is any present or threatened future difficulty between the American and the Philippine governments justifying warlike activities, and as a believer in the humanity of the American people refuse to acquiesce in the idea that America designed war upon the Philippine Islands.

"I cannot, as I have said, conceive any reason why the armies and navies of the United States lately employed against her common enemy should now be turned against America's recent associate.

"I am sure you will appreciate, in view of the circumstances I have detailed, the quieting and reassuring effect upon the minds of my countrymen to result from a disclaimer upon the part of the American Government of any intention to attack their liberties and independence.

"Notwithstanding the serious difficulty under which I labor in not having been formally received by the American Government as a representative of the Filipino nation, I feel it my imperative duty to call your attention to the disturbing facts before enumerated to the end that I may receive from you such assurances as will satisfy my countrymen that it is not the intention of America to make war upon the new republic of Asia, and which will explain to it the reason why large armies and navies should be dispatched to the Philippine Islands, and which will relieve my countrymen of the fear that now possesses them that their liberties are endangered at the hands of a republic whose name they always believed was associated with freedom, and to which they have come first applying for recognition among the nations of the earth.

"I desire again to express the gratitude of my nation to America for services rendered by her in furthering Filipino independence, and to express the hope that friendly relations may ever continue.

"In view of the present alarming situation

may I respectfully urge the importance of an immediate answer?"

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The reasonable prayer contained in the above quotation has never been granted. The letter itself, with several other letters and memorials, were never accorded the courtesy of even a formal acknowledgment of receipt. Those who care to review the situation will see that the letter just quoted was prophetic of what subsequently occurred. When two armed forces are within striking distance; the one waiting—perhaps impatiently—the result of proffered negotiation, the other increasing its forces, the merest indiscretion or display of temper on either side may precipitate a conflict. It has been truly said that "the raising of the eyebrows may affect the destiny of a nation." It is equally true that the smallest act may provoke a bitter and disastrous quarrel. It is then easy to raise one's hands in horror at the enormity of the offense. It is also easy for one side to charge the other with the whole of the blame. If our representative's reasonable and humane request had been granted it would have had a reassuring and calming influence on both forces. But notwithstanding the concentration of the additional troops referred to, and in spite of this reasonable plea for an explanation, the whole of the responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities has been placed upon the Filipinos, and a declaration has been made on high authority that "every effort at peace was exhausted!" Is this fair? The Filipinos had much to lose and nothing whatever to gain by a conflict with the American forces. Would they be likely to deliberately commit an act so palpably detrimental to their interests, and so opportune for securing the ratification of the Treaty of Peace? It should not be forgotten that the report of the outbreak of hostilities was furnished by those who exercised a censorship over all telegraphic dispatches from Manila. I do not for a moment mean to imply that the censors were guilty of deliberate fabrication. The American soldiers gave their version from their own point of view. A Filipino, with equal sincerity, might have given a directly opposite version. Reasonable, fair-minded persons recognize that there are al-

ways two sides to a story. The Filipino version has not yet been given. But lest I should be charged with a one-sidedness similar to that of which I complain, let me quote the Congressional speech of Senator Tillman, whose reasonable view of the case I hereby adopt as my own:

"Mr. President, what caused this last battle of Manila? The reports which we received through our newspapers all come from American sources. They charge that the Filipinos wantonly attacked the American army, and that that army had a right to defend itself, which nobody assumes to deny. But when we recollect that the telegraph lines from those islands are in charge of the American commander there, or of those whom he designates to control them, it is natural for us to suppose that nothing would be let out under the censorship which has existed for the last three months or more that would be in the slightest degree derogatory to the good faith or the honor of the American army there. Time alone will tell whether this battle was provoked by the Filipinos for purposes of their own or by the Americans for the purpose of endeavoring to sway men in this Senate to ratify the treaty and change the status. I recall one of *Æsop's* fables in which a painter had depicted a lion lying on his back prone beneath the heel of a man, and when he showed the painting to the lion the lion said: 'Yes, you painted that; but if you will let me paint it, the situation will be just the opposite.'"

What then is the reason for this war in the Philippines? Is it because—as is alleged—one or more Filipinos crossed the American lines at an hour when they were forbidden to do so? This would furnish a wholly inadequate reason for offensive action. If a Filipino acted in defiance—either in ignorance or wittingly—of an order given by the United States Commander, however unwise or uncalled for or provocative that order may have been, the American soldiers acted within their legal rights in punishing the offender. And if the Filipino army, believing that an attack was being made upon it, rushed to arms, the American soldiers were within their rights in offering a complete and effective resistance. But why should America then take up the offensive? If, as stated, the Filipino army was promptly driven from its intrenchments, there could have been no necessity, in military tactics, for a continuance of the offensive for a pe-