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## "The White Man's Burden"

By John J. Hill, D.D.

Man's capacity for self-deception is almost unlimited. A catching phrase, like that which heads this article, is often a more ample cloak than charity—it will cover more sins. If we can make a wrong thing wear the appearance of that which is neutral morally, we have accomplished much that is to our satisfaction. But if we can dress a wrong deed in the garb of absolute and positive righteousness, how we rejoice, and write poems and sing songs!

"The strong ought to bear the burdens of the weak!" The white man is strong, therefore he ought to take up, unasked—in-deed, against the will of the brother whom he calls weak—the burden of his civilization and government, and bear it for him—and charge him a right good sum for portorage!

England, from the first days of "John Company" until the present, has been "bearing the white man's burden" in India. It has cost her much—the lives of some thousands of her surplus population, of those who probably otherwise would have come on the parish for support. And she has made the "weak" whose burden she was bearing pay the cost of the savage and long-continued wars that were necessary in order to enable her to compel these same "weak" to let her bear their burden! And her "portorage"—the price she has received, or rather has wrenched, from these "weak" in payment for the bearing of the burden—has enriched her until she is fairly apoplectic with wealth. England is undertaking to "bear the white man's burden" also in Africa. Of course she will bring civilization there as she has into India. But at what a cost to herself in moral, to the peoples of that dark land in material, things and in life!

The men who settled this continent undertook in their rude way to bear "the white man's burden," so far as the Indian was concerned. But some of them were not experienced enough in the art of specious nomenclature to enable them to cloak their deeds with the garb of seeming righteousness. They did these things better in Peru and Mexico! Some of us cannot forget that the defense of slavery was that it was "taking up the white man's burden," though, unfortunately for the advocates of that benign system, the specious term had not then been invented.

As a plea for political and territorial expansion of the United States we are told in glowing, though somewhat disjointed, verse, which it is very much the fashion in these days to admire, that we are to take up "the white man's burden" in the Philippine Islands. Is it significant that the writer of the famous poem whose caption is "The White Man's Burden," is an Englishman from India? that England loudly applauds our proposed occupancy of the Philippines?

Presumably, from the word "burden," it is meant that we are to take these poor, ignorant, besotted, and liberty-loving islanders and civilize them; peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must. That would be bad enough; far enough from the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the underlying thought of our great republic. But it is really much worse than that. It means that we are to gratify our desire to see ourselves a nation on whose territory the sun never sets. It means that we are to gratify our greed by the acquisition of territory which we can control in its trade and possibilities of trade for the future, all for ourselves. It means that we are to gratify our ambition and the needs and demands of office-seekers and politicians for a field large enough, if possible, to give the multitudes of disappointed ones an appointment. It means that we are to compel, by force of arms, a people who are struggling the best they know how to attain to liberty, to accept our ideas of government, of liberty, and of order; and, instead of working out these problems for themselves, where the real strength is gained, we are to force them to take the results of our attempts at solution ready-made from our hands. And this is a process which will make these peoples to that extent unfit for the attainment of self-government.

"The white man's burden" is not to be carried on the point of a bayonet, nor trundled along on a gun carriage. If it were so, then the Lord Jesus Christ made a great mistake when, with the unlimited force at His control, He refused to summon His more

than twelve legions of angels to force "civilization" on the people of His time! The true "burden" of the white man is to teach, to preach, to illustrate by his life the principles and the outworking of the civil and religious liberty which he enjoys; to suffer, as our missionaries have been suffering, in attempting to reclaim and civilize these ignorant peoples. It is to die under the load, and in the eyes of the world to fail, as Jesus did, and thus to realize the highest and truest success, as He has done. In this specious putting of territorial expansion, as "bearing the white man's burden," is there not a suspicion of that event in the life of the Lord when a certain personage, in whose existence it is now fashionable to disbelieve, took Jesus up into an exceeding high mountain?

Yea, we must "take up the white man's burden" if the majority of the nation so decides. But let us throw this term and all other misleading terms to the winds. Let us not falsely insist that what is a mere side issue in this matter, the civilization of the islanders, is the principal purpose and object. Let us say boldly to the world, to ourselves first of all, that we want the Philippine Islands in order to secure to ourselves territory, wealth, glory, opening of trade, a foothold as a nation, and opportunities as individuals in the Eastern hemisphere. Let us be honest with ourselves; for it is certain we are not deceiving anybody else.

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