

The Commoner.

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THE RELIGIOUS ARGUMENT

The Penticostal Herald, of Louisville, Ky., reprints an editorial on the Philippine question written by Doctor Winston, editor of the Nashville Christian Herald. It so ably presents the "religious" argument used by the imperialists that it is reproduced on another page in order that the reader may the better understand the answer thereto.

The text of Doctor Winston's editorial is to be found in the sentence: "But should not the meaning of the present situation be sought not in what we need but rather in what they need?"

This puts the United States in the attitude of a benevolent parent dealing with a child and generously considering the interest of the child rather than the interest of the parent. Before this position is accepted as the true one, it is well to remember that it is the attitude of all who have engaged in persecution. Every individual or group of individuals guilty of forcing any form of religion upon non-Christians or upon Christians holding to a different creed has done it under the firm conviction that the persons persecuted were being benefitted. Persecution has always been defended, when defended at all, on the ground that the tortures employed were really employed for the spiritual welfare of the persons tortured. If the victim died before his reformation was complete it did not alter the theory or disturb the complacency of those who were putting the theory into practice. Those who believe that they can beat blessings into their fellows are never disturbed by so trivial a thing as the death of the person to be benefitted, because could not the person escape death by accepting the blessings offered or by adopting the opinion suggested?

Not only has Doctor Winston's theory been employed by those who have persecuted in the name of the Almighty, but it has been employed by those who have claimed to rule by divine right. Every king, czar or emperor who has forced arbitrary government upon his subjects or upon colonies against their will has done it on the theory that he was regarding the good of his subjects rather than the good of himself. The annals of despotism are full of protestations of unselfishness and benevolence made by rulers who were forcing unsought blessings on their suffering subjects—and exacting a high price therefor.

To come down to our own country, every argument made in behalf of slavery was based upon the theory that slavery was for the good of the slave, and no one acquainted with the slaveholder or with the history of slaveholding can doubt that in most, if not in all cases the slaveholder conscientiously believed that the system of slavery was best for the slave. The Bible was quoted in support of slavery as an institution, and Lincoln complained bitterly that he had the support of so few of the ministers of his own city in his efforts to prevent the extension of slavery.

Reference is made to persecution, to monarchy and to slavery only to show that the position which Doctor Winston takes is not a new one, but has been the position occupied by those who have attempted to force their opinions or their guardianship upon others. If any one points to the fact that nations made formally Christian by the sword have afterwards become devout supporters of that religion, or to the fact that kings have sometimes benefitted their subjects or to the fact that slavery brought much of good to people carried away from Africa by force, it is a sufficient answer to say that a different test must be applied. The question is not whether some good may not have followed a wrong course, but whether greater good might not have followed a better course. It is a mistake commonly made to credit a bad system with good that

may follow, whereas we should rather consider the greater good that might have followed wiser action. To say that a cruel and unkind parent may confer some benefit upon his child may be true, and yet a wise and kind parent might confer a far greater benefit.

Doctor Winston quotes some one (name not given) as saying "I went to the Philippine Islands convinced that our retention of them was an international crime. I left them convinced that any other course than that we are pursuing would be a breach of international humanity, comparable to leaving a helpless infant to perish in the storm. When they will be ready for self-government is an interesting question, but at present it is academic. It is a fact that they are not ready or capable for it."

This is the opinion of one individual, name unknown; but even if his name were known and it were a name familiar to all, it would still be the opinion of one man. The fact that he changed his opinion after visiting the Philippines does not add greatly to the weight of his testimony. If Doctor Winston desired to prove that the American people are incapable of self-government he would find men in this country who would take the stand and testify to their belief that free government is a failure, but such testimony ought not to have any weight with those who believe in free institutions.

The moment we assert that some people are capable of self-government and some people incapable, that moment we not only destroy the foundation upon which free government rests, but we question the wisdom and benevolence of the Creator. Henry Clay, fifty years ago, in discussing the rights of the people of South America, said:

It is not, therefore, true, that the imputed ignorance exists; but if it do, I repeat, I dispute the inference. It is the doctrine of thrones, that man is too ignorant to govern himself. Their partisans assert his incapacity, in reference to all nations; if they can not command universal assent to the proposition, it is then demanded to particular nations; and our pride and our presumption too often make converts of us. I contend, that it is to arraign the dispositions of Providence himself, to suppose that he has created beings incapable of governing themselves, and to be trampled on by kings. Self-government is the natural government of man.

And so it may be said today, that it would be a reflection upon the Almighty to say that he made Filipinos and left them for thousands of years incapable of self-government—that is to say, helpless—until Spain found them, governed them against their will for three centuries and then sold us the privilege of continuing an alien government.

The doctrine that Doctor Winston presents is bad enough where there is no admixture of selfish interest. A man who conscientiously believes that it is his Christian duty to force his authority upon another is dangerous enough when he is actuated solely by conscience, but he is still more dangerous if there is added a pecuniary motive. The president in his letter of acceptance dwelt upon our duty to the Filipinos but he also intimated that we would find it advantageous to ourselves to hold the Philippine islands. Senator Lodge four years ago in his speech as chairman of the republican national convention, assured the country that we were not forgetting ourselves entirely. Where money and morals are mixed it is difficult, if not impossible, to tell where greed leaves off and conscience begins.

It must also be remembered that a large majority of the Filipinos belong to one branch of the Christian church and if we are to defend a colonial policy on religious grounds we are apt to find some clashing between the denominations. The missionary spirit has been appealed to to some extent, and some have convinced themselves that a colonial system in the Philippines is in the interest of Protestantism. Words need not be multiplied to convince the readers of The Commoner that a governmental policy intended to help one branch of the Christian church as against another branch, or to help the Christian church as a whole against another religious faith is entirely inconsistent with our theory of government as well as with the spirit of our religion.

If, as Doctor Winston suggests, the only question is whether a colonial policy administered by us would be best for the Filipinos, The Commoner would answer in the negative. This country can help the Filipinos more by setting them an example than it can by sending them carpet-bag officials. It can help them infinitely more, and do it at far less expense, by educating their young men and young women and sending them back to spread the light of our civilization and the blessings of our institutions. The Filipinos will naturally trust the people of their own race more than they will trust foreigners. The American colonists, in order to secure their independence, were willing to fight members of their own race, communicants of their own church and those who spoke their own language. Can anyone doubt that the Filipinos will resent as bitterly our attempt to govern them, differing as we do from them in both language and race?

It is safe to say that a colonial policy in the Philippines will cost the American people at least a hundred millions a year, if we take into consideration the increase in the army and the navy—an increase defended on the ground of our colonial policy. Ten per cent of that money spent in the education of Filipinos in American colleges would in a few generations bring more benefit to the Filipinos than we could bring in a thousand years by a colonial system.

Doctor Winston overlooks entirely the enlightening influence of self-government and the degrading and demoralizing influence of an alien government such as we are now administering, but the question which Doctor Winston puts is not the controlling question in this matter. Our country has a great work to do and it could not afford to give up that work, even if it could be shown that by so doing we would help the Filipinos. Our nation has been for a hundred years the exponent of the doctrine of self-government. It has brought untold good to the world by presenting a new national ideal to mankind. So long as this nation administers a colonial policy it is impotent to help the cause of human liberty. If our nation endorses the doctrine set forth by Doctor Winston's unnamed visitor—namely, that the Filipinos are incapable of self-government—it denies the doctrine of the Declaration of Independence and places a limitation upon the truths given to the world in 1776. The moment this country announces to the world that it has amended the Declaration of Independence, the moment that it declares that governments can in some instances derive their just powers from some other source than the consent of the governed, it ceases to be the champion of the doctrine of self-government and the injury that would be done to the world by a modification of its position must be weighed against any good, real or imaginary, that we could confer upon the Filipinos.

Not only must we calculate the harm which