

PHILIPPINE INDEPENDENCE--WHEN?

(Written by James H. Blount, late Judge of the Court of First Instance of the Philippine Islands, for the North American Review. Copyright by the Review and reproduced by permission.)

After seven years spent at the "storm-centre" of "Expansion," the first of the seven as a volunteer officer in Cuba, the next two in a like capacity in the Philippines, and the remainder in the last-named country as United States Judge, the writer was finally invalided home last spring, sustained in spirit at parting by cordial farewells, oral and written, personal and official. Having now been invited by the editor of the Review to prepare an article embodying his views as to our Philippine problem, he naturally enters upon a discussion of the subject with some degree of diffidence, because it involves calling in question the wisdom and righteousness of a policy inaugurated and carried out by a small group of distinguished men, under whom he shared in this nation's work beyond seas for a very considerable fraction of the average duration of life. However, he can truly say to all former fellow workers:

"I have eaten your bread and salt,
I have drunk your water and wine,
The deaths ye died I have watched beside
And the lives that ye led were mine.

"Was there aught that I did not share
In vigil or toil or ease,—
One joy or woe that I did not know,
Dear friends across the seas?"

In Charles Dickens' novel "Bleak House," there is a chapter entitled "Telescopic Philanthropy," wherein is introduced the famous Mrs. Jellyby, the mother of a large and interesting family, "a lady of very remarkable strength of character, who devotes herself entirely to the public," who "has devoted herself to an extensive variety of public subjects, at various times, and is at present devoted to the subject of Africa, with a general view to the cultivation of the coffee berry—and the natives;" to the great prejudice of her domestic concerns, and the neglect of her own children, the latter continually getting into all kinds of mischief while her attention is diverted from home. Seeing that the present administration proposes to continue its policy of "benevolent assimilation" in the remote Philippines indefinitely, at whatever cost, the analogy between its attitude and Mrs. Jellyby's misplaced philanthropy toward "the people of Borrioboola-Gha, on the left bank of the Niger," is by no means remote.

Mr. Bryan maintains, substantially:

- (1) That the Filipinos want independence.
- (2) That, if protected from the great land-acquiring powers, "so far as their own internal affairs are concerned, they do not need to be subject to any alien government."
- (3) That we should at once disclaim any intention of exercising permanent sovereignty over the archipelago, and declare it to be our purpose to remain only long enough to see a stable government started, and then leave them to work out their own destiny.

Mr. Taft would probably have taken issue with Mr. Bryan on the first proposition up to the time he visited the islands in the summer of 1905, accompanied by a party of senators and congressmen. He will hardly do so now.

Senator Dubois, of Idaho, who was a member of the congressional party referred to, has since said in the New York "Independent":

"All the Filipinos, with the exception of those who are holding positions under and drawing salaries from our government, favor a government of their own. There is scarcely an exception among them. * * * There is nobody in the islands, no organization of any kind or description, which favors the policy of our government toward them."

Senator Newlands, of Nevada, also a member of the congressional party aforesaid, has declared, in the number of this Review for December, 1905, that practically the whole people desire independence. Congressman Parsons, also a member of the same party, has since said: "There is no question that all the Filipino parties are now in favor of independence."

Captain J. A. Moss, of the Twenty-fourth infantry, a member of General Corbin's staff, is quoted by Mr. Bryan, in "The Commoner" of April 27, 1906, as saying, in an article published in a Manila paper while Mr. Bryan was in the islands, with reference to the wishes of "the great majority" of the Filipinos, that "to please them, we cannot get out of the islands too soon."

Mr. Bryan's second proposition, with which Mr. Taft takes issue, is that "so far as their own internal affairs are concerned, they do not need

to be subject to any alien government," provided, of course, they are protected from the danger of annexation by some one of the great nations. If this proposition be sound, subject to the proviso, the proviso can easily be met. The foremost citizen of the world today, the man who brought the Japanese-Russian war to a conclusion and thereby won the high regard of all mankind, can, and if so requested by the congress probably will, within a comparatively short period, negotiate a treaty with the great nations, securing the neutralization of the islands, and the recognition of their independence whenever the same shall be granted to them by the United States. If the powers should thus agree to consider the Philippines neutral territory forever, Mr. Roosevelt would have done for them exactly what has already been done for Belgium and Switzerland by treaty between the great powers of Europe. When the resolution of Congressman McCall, of Massachusetts, proposing this, was under consideration before the house committee on Philippine affairs on April 7, 1906, it met with a very considerable degree of sympathy, as is manifest from the official report of the hearing, the main objection apparently being that, because there are a number of different dialects, the Filipinos are a heterogeneous lot, and there is no spirit of Philippine nationality. Governor Taft said to the senate committee in February, 1902:

"While it is true that there are a number of Christian tribes, so called, that speak different languages, there is a homogeneity in the people in appearance, in habits, and in many avenues of thought. To begin with, they are all Catholics."

The Philippine Census, published by the war department in March, 1905, says (Vol. I, page 447):

"A town in the Cagayan valley presents the same style of architecture, the same surrounding barrios, has the same kind of stores and similarly dressed people, as a Christian municipality of the island of Mindanao."

And says the same government publication (Vol. II, p. 9), in drawing a comparison between itself and the schedules of the twelfth census of the United States:

"Those of the Philippine census are somewhat simpler, the differences being due mainly to the more homogenous character of the population of the Philippine Islands!"

The existence of a general and conscious aspiration for a national life of their own, the Real Presence of a universal longing to be allowed to pursue happiness in their own way and not in somebody else's way, is, to the best of such knowledge and belief as the writer obtained after two years' service in the army that subjugated them, and four years in the Insular Judiciary, one of the most obvious and pathetic facts in the whole situation. During the organized fighting, no American ever discovered that the enemy was crippled, or his effectiveness diminished, by the lack of a common language. And as for the National Spirit, those people have been welded into absolute unity by the events of the last eight years. Rizal was shot for writing a political novel in which the Spaniards thought there was too much recognition of the "Nationalist" idea. And if we should get into a war with a first-class power, and Aguinaldo, or Juan Cailles, the man who crumpled the gallant Fifteenth Infantry in 1901, should raise the standard of revolt, let the impartial reader ask any American now in the Philippines, or any American who has spent much time there, how many natives between Aparri and Cagayan de Misamis would fail to understand and rally to the cry "Viva La Republica Filipina!" Let us hope that if the McCall resolution ever comes up again, the committee will have become satisfied, beyond the peradventure of a doubt, that there does, in fact, exist among all the people of the Philippine Islands a consciousness of racial unity, which draws them together as against all outsiders, and is not marred by any race problem such as exists in Cuba.

The independence of the Philippines should come about within a few years—that is, as soon as practicable—because it is best for both countries. We are governing them against their consent and at an enormous cost to both peoples. If the untold millions we have spent on "benevolent assimilation" since February 4, 1899, had been spent on rivers and harbors and canals, and the improvement of our interior water transportation generally, the railroad rate question would have solved itself without the need of a rate bill. And this is not the only one of Mrs. Jellyby's neglected children, not the only domestic problem which presents a subject for strenuous altruism sufficient to occupy all the patriotism and statesman-

ship of this great country with its eighty millions of people. If all the splendid ability and grim fortitude that have been concentrated during the last few years upon "telescopic philanthropy" in the Philippines had been steadily focussed upon the economic and social problems which are clamoring ever more loudly and ominously for solution at home, Hearst and Hearstism would never have arisen to voice a profound and widespread discontent having in it an element of righteousness.

But, returning to the core of Mr. Bryan's second proposition, namely, that "so far as their own internal affairs are concerned, they do not need to be subject to any alien government," he further says:

"There is a wide difference, it is true, between the general intelligence of the educated Filipino and the laborer on the street and in the field, but this is not a barrier to self-government. Intelligence controls in every government, except where it is suppressed by military force. * * * 'Ninety-tenths of the Japanese have no part in the law-making.' In Mexico, the gap between the educated classes and the peons is fully as great as, if not greater than, the gap between the extremes of Filipino society. Those who question the capacity of the Filipinos for self-government * * * forget that * * * patriotism raises up persons fitted for the work that needs to be done."

And here is the testimony of one of the most distinguished congressmen who have visited the islands:

"I have little or no doubt that there are a sufficient number of wise and intelligent Filipinos to establish and maintain a government in the Philippines, that will compare in liberality and effectiveness with a very great many of the governments that have been in successful operation for a century or more."

Edmund Burke once said, in a speech for which Americans have long delighted to honor his memory: "The general character and situation of a people must determine what sort of government is fitted for them. That, nothing else can or ought to determine."

The congressman last above quoted talks of twenty years as a safe period of tutelage. Senators Newlands and Dubois of thirty years, Mr. Bryan of five, or ten, or fifteen. But the gentleman last named insisted at the convention of 1904, and still insists, that we should make them a definite promise of independence now, the same to be executed as soon as practicable.

To this, the proposition of the democracy, Mr. Taft's answer is:

"The gentlemen that are looking for office under an independent government, have very little concern about independence that is to come after they are dead; and if you permit their independence, and make it a definite promise, you will have a continued agitation there as to when they ought to have independence."

The imputation of selfishness put by this statement upon all Filipinos who desire independence is uncalled for. "The gentlemen that are looking for office under an independent government" could undoubtedly get office under the present government if they would only stop wanting independence. And "if you permit their independence, and make it a definite promise," you will have no agitation to hasten the day, provided the promise itself fix the day. During nearly four years of service on the bench in the Philippines, the writer heard as much genuine, impassioned and effective eloquence from Filipino lawyers, saw exhibited in the trial of causes as much industrious preparation, and zealous, loyal advocacy of the rights of clients, as any ordinary nisi prius judge at home is likely to meet with in the same length of time. Some of these lawyers are ex-officers of the insurgent army. Each of them has his clients, and is the center of a circle of influence. All of them, without exception, want independence. Of course the law of self-preservation precludes them from proclaiming this from the house-tops, especially if they are holding office under the government. But in their heart of hearts, the dearest hope that each of them cherishes is that he may live to see the Star of the Philippine Republic risen in the Far East. Let a date be fixed by the United States congress for turning over the government of the archipelago to its people, a date which will afford to the great majority of the present generation a reasonable expectation of living to see the independence of their country, and all political unrest, including most of the brigandage in the islands, will at once cease. The news will spread "like wildfire," to borrow a famous phrase of our sunshiny secre-