

Taft a Biased Judge

May a humble citizen add his word to the discussion between the secretary of war and those who are asking the coming presidential conventions to put planks promising eventual independence to the Filipinos into their platforms? Secretary Taft thinks that any such promise will unsettle the Filipino mind, now in a fair way of being "educated" politically. It will start all the native politicians to intriguing for position in anticipation of the promised day, and if that day be less than a hundred years off, Mr. Taft thinks it will find the natives still untrained, still unfit, and prove to be more of a calamity than a blessing to them.

Now, I yield to no one in esteem for Secretary Taft, whom I believe to be one of the finest characters now in public life anywhere. The candor of his speeches on this question wins my especial admiration. Unlike the simple, brazen official utterances to which we have grown accustomed in Filipino affairs, what he says is really instructive. Assuming that we are something more than partisan rooters, to whom he must supply phrases, he seeks to persuade our intellects by the very reasons which persuade his own, and he conceals no facts. It would greatly raise the tone of political discussion everywhere if his example could be followed.

On all these accounts, and because he has been there, and knows the places where the shoe pinches, Mr. Taft's prestige is naturally enormous. His knowledge is concrete and solid, men say, while that of the bishops and college presidents who have signed the petition for independence is vague and remote. It would be no wonder if at the conventions his advice should carry the day against all the voices

that urge an independence plank. "In the very nature of things," the delegates who think, "his opinion must be wiser than that of all these people at this distance."

I wish now to give some reasons why the opinion of a man who has played Governor Taft's position in the islands does not deserve to carry this pre-eminent authority, and why the remoter view of long-range judges may well on the whole be wiser. I believe that his close personal relations to the struggle, so far from strengthening the prestige of any general views of policy which he may utter, ought, on the contrary, to be allowed for and discounted. It seems to me emphatically a case for applying the "personal equation."

Secretary Taft is himself the creator of the present regime in the Philippines. He was sent there to repair the work of mere destruction which President McKinley's administration had with such a light heart originally blundered into, and to turn, if possible, a purely military conquest into a genuine assimilation. He accepted the mission in good faith, and organized a government, of which the sole animating principle is the permanent welfare of the natives—as we are able to conceive that welfare. He started this work under incredible difficulties, in the midst of war, with American army opinion dead against him, with all the riff-raff of American exploiters and editors in Manila down upon him, with native support inefficient and suspicious when not actively treacherous, and with no help save that of his few official coadjutors and of his conscience. The hard beginnings of the task are over, and the infant administration toddles on two legs successfully. Evolution on the

lines attempted seems possible; one by one the later features of the program may be realized.

Is it humanly conceivable that the creator of such an unfinished state of things should willingly suffer its evolution to be interrupted? It is the child of his loins and he must insist upon its growing to maturity. The good of the islands, as he is able to imagine it, is identified with that program exclusively. Other good, as other people may imagine it, is not that good, is but that good's destruction. Secretary Taft is in the very nature of the case bound, even though there were a flagrantly better possible alternative to remain a passionate advocate of the system of which he is himself the author. He is morally unable to be an impartial witness.

As regards the system's prosperous evolution, his hopefulness ought also to be taken with a large discount by the American delegate and voter. The governor general of an Oriental dependency cannot possibly see into the full rottenness of a situation, if it be really rotten. The information he goes by is certain to be accommodated and predigested for his reception. Hardly a native meets him sincerely; and his official family, laboring under identical drawbacks, cannot restore the balance to his sense of reality.

Mr. Taft, in short, is too close to the Philippine job to estimate its general historical bearings. These general bearings are, it seems to me, probably more justly apprehended by such educated men at home as those who have signed the petition to the conventions.

To myself, as one of the signers, the great historical objection to Secretary Taft's scheme is that it is so desperately Utopian. "The Philippines for the Filipino" is an admirable watchword, but that it actually should be a watchword reveals the whole priggishness and spuriousness of the situation, to remind us conquerors of our duty.

Countries that really are for their inhabitants have no such watchwords; the fact that they are for them is obvious. The watchword in this case is "We are to give" the Filipino true liberty instead of the false liberty he aspires to; we are to reveal his better self to him, to be his savior against his own weakness.

The officials entrusted with the carrying out of such a policy ought to be the offspring of a marriage between angels and steam engines. They ought, at least, to be an apostolic succession of missionaries. Secretary Taft himself and a few of his colleagues have the best missionary spirit. But the frankness with which he admits his moral isolation is pathetic. If the natives are ever to do the American character justice, he thinks, the Americans who go to the Philippines must, first of all, change their character and manners. Even the teachers, if reports can be trusted, have become rowdies, and scores of them deserve to be deported.

Mr. Taft says: "Give us a hundred years and we may outgrow these difficulties. Let the question of independence then be broached, if need be, but not sooner. But is this anything but the enthusiasm of an initiator over his own work, and does not all history speak loudly against it? Is it likely that a succession of Tafts can be provided? And if we turn from official life to private life, can the leopard change his spots, or the Anglo-Saxon his unsociability? And can Americans of the sort that go to try their fortunes in the tropics ever be expected to succeed in the role of sympathetic friends and helpful elder brothers?"

The trouble is that every step in the success of the Taft program will breed new kinds of trouble. Suppose the Filipinos take all the education we give them—that will only make them the more frantic for independence—it is the "educated" natives of India

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