

IMPERIALISM.

[Address of Edward Atkinson, to the Workmen's Political League, Boston, February 17, 1899.]

(Feb. 16.) Having been honored by your invitation to address the Workmen's Political League tomorrow evening, February 17, it is proper that I should in some measure prepare for a joint debate with my friend, Mr. J. R. Procter. Yet I should be unwilling to enter upon that joint debate, the course of which must be governed by the opening of the case by Mr. Procter, without putting carefully on record the point of view from which I shall deal with the subject. This is the more necessary because on this very evening fateful words may be spoken by the president by which not only the future welfare of this nation may be made or marred, but on which the very honor and moral integrity of the nation may either be sustained or endangered.

On the 11th of April, 1898, President William McKinley, speaking as the head of the nation in calling upon the people to support the government in an effort to remove the oppressive rule of Spain from the island of Cuba, used these words:

"I speak not of forcible annexation, for that cannot be thought of. That by our code of morality would be criminal aggression."

I trust that President William McKinley here present as the representative of the nation may have again taken this evening the same position which he held on April 11, 1898, and on which he attained the confidence and support of the nation, so that he may again in spite of aberration be entitled once more to that support.

A necessary incident of that undertaking to remove the oppressive rule of Spain from the island of Cuba has been the abatement of the same oppressive rule from the Philippine islands. Nothing has changed in the purpose of the undertaking nor in the conditions. The conditions are only what any man entitled to deference either in position or capacity might and should have expected. The only unexpected occurrence has been that through the admirable organization of the navy under competent officers and well-trained men the naval forces of Spain have been swept from the ocean with relatively little effort and almost no loss of life on our own part; while in spite of the grave faults in the organization of the army, in its direction and in the conduct of its work, the land forces in Cuba have attained an almost unwarranted success, due mainly to the force and bravery of the privates in our own army and to the incapacity of the leaders of their opponents, while in the Philippine islands, through the superiority of their arms and the support of the navy they (our land forces) have been enabled to slaughter many thousand in-

habitants who had trusted the purpose of this country and who have been led to violent resistance under conditions which may yet bring the government of this nation into disgrace. In this fight we have extended our possession of the Philippines ten miles. By the code of morality of this nation the work of slaughtering has been lately executed under the orders of the chief executive, is not this act one of criminal aggression, carried out with such effect that while we may find no fault, perhaps only praise for the soldiers who have done this work, we may find nothing but shame for us who are thus placed at the bar of nations to answer for the wrongs which we are now inflicting?

Who are the Filipinos? They are a people of many tribes and races, but among them appear to be men whose record so far as we have any knowledge of it, is equal in its ability and merit to that of the leaders of any people who ever resisted oppression and who ever before made an effort to secure for themselves and those dependent upon them the right of home rule and of government by consent of the governed. Their leader, Aguinaldo, brought back to his native land by ourselves in order to aid, as he did aid us, in the removal of Spanish rule from that small section in which the Spanish still held power, has taken part with others in framing a constitution which I have not seen, but which Senator Hoar, than whom there could be no better judge, pronounces a document of unequalled merit. They have drawn up and presented state papers to our department of state and to the military officers in command in Manila which we have all read or might have read, which are themselves models of intelligent comprehension of their rights, clear and plain in their conclusions, but which to the discredit and perhaps to the dishonor of the people of this country, the state department has refused acceptance, while the military authorities in Manila have rejected this appeal to right and reason.

And now we are allowed to believe, perhaps led to believe, that the agent of the Filipinos in this country sent a message to incite the members of his government and its leaders to attack the forces of the United States; and we are told that General Otis, in command of the forces, has been influenced by this information. Think for a moment of the reckless absurdity of this charge when you bear in mind that the only wire over which that message could have been transmitted to Manila is under the control and censorship of the military authorities of the United States. This assertion is not only absurd in itself but it has been denied by Aguinaldo and Agoncillo with a challenge for any one to produce such a telegram.

Who is this Aguinaldo? Apparently a born leader of men, carried back to

his own country in one of our ships of war to help hold the Spanish troops within the narrow lines of the city of Manila, where they have been easily subdued by our forces. If one would know more of this man read his noble protest against the unlawful proclamation of President William McKinley after he had forgotten his declaration against criminal aggression, when even before either branch of congress acted he gave our troops instructions to take military possession of the Philippine islands without the consent of the well-organized government already acting under a constitution with chosen leaders, every one of whose protests and papers submitted has proved them to be more capable of establishing a strong government with protection to property and persons than has yet become apparent in the island of Cuba.

Now, whatever might be the material advantages of permanent control over these islands, even if there were any; whatever might be the gain in commerce; whatever might be the positions of influence and power to be secured by this control; we have neither the moral right, the political right, and I hope we have not the physical power to compel the inhabitants of these islands to become our vassals and to submit to a rule under the pretense of Christian benefit to them at the point of the bayonet with the sacrifice of thousands of their number to this Moloch of expansion. We have heard of the deathly roll of the wheels of Juggernaut, passing over the bodies of its victims. To these countries and isolated people of the Philippine islands who prostrated themselves before us in the expectation and hope of benefit, this nation has become the Juggernaut, crushing them to their death, breaking faith with them and planting in their minds for generations a sense of animosity which it may take a century to remove.

Taking up the case at the day of the meeting, the 17th, thus far had I gone in stating the point of view from which I shall speak to you tonight before President William McKinley had declared his allegiance to the principles of the Anti-Imperialist League in his address at the Home Market Club, which now on the morning of the 17th is before us. We welcome his declaration that "No imperial designs lurk in the American mind." We concur with him "That they are alien to American sentiment, thought and purpose." We have declared that "Our priceless principles undergo no change under a tropical sun."

He asks: "If we can benefit those remote peoples, who will object?" Who has objected? Is not that the very demand upon the executive of this nation, that it shall benefit these remote people? And how are we benefitting them today? By criminal aggression without authority of law. They have been led