

THE SPANISH WAR.

A Prophecy or an Exception?

[By the Hon. David J. Brewer, associate justice of the supreme court of the United States].

On the 18th day of April, 1898, congress, by an overwhelming vote, passed this resolution:

"Joint resolution for the recognition of the independence of the people of Cuba, demanding that the government of Spain relinquish its authority and government in the island of Cuba, and to withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba and Cuban waters, and directing the president of the United States to use the land and naval forces of the United States to carry these resolutions into effect.

"WHEREAS, The abhorrent conditions which have existed for more than three years in the island of Cuba, so near our own borders, have shocked the moral sense of the people of the United States, have been a disgrace to Christian civilization, culminating, as they have, in the destruction of a United States battleship, with 265 of its officers and crew, while on a friendly visit in the harbor of Havana, and cannot longer be endured, as has been set forth by the president of the United States in his message to congress of April 11, 1898, upon which the action of congress was invited; therefore,

"Resolved, By the senate and house of representatives of the United States of America, in congress assembled:

"First.—That the people of the island of Cuba are, and of right ought to be, free and independent.

"Second.—That it is the duty of the United States to demand, and the government of the United States does hereby demand, that the government of Spain at once relinquish its authority and government in the island of Cuba and withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba and Cuban waters.

"Third.—That the president of the United States be, and he hereby is, directed and empowered to use the entire land and naval forces of the United States, and to call into the actual service of the United States the militia of the several states, to such extent as may be necessary to carry these resolutions into effect.

"Fourth.—That the United States hereby disclaims any disposition or intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction or control over said island, except for the pacification thereof, and asserts its determination, when that is accomplished, to leave the government and control of the island to its people.

"Approved April 20, 1898."

This was the official declaration by the nation of its purpose in commencing the recent war. If thereupon Spain had withdrawn its troops from Cuba and left the people of the island free to es-

tablish their own government there would have been no war. And when as the result of the conflict Spain relinquished all dominion and control of Cuba and left her people free, the purpose of the war was accomplished.

It were going too far to say that the philanthropic motive of emancipating Cuba was the sole cause of the war. Other matters tended more or less directly to precipitate the collision. Cuba had been for years in a state of chronic disturbance. Its unsettled condition had seriously interfered with our commercial relations with the island and pecuniarily damaged our interests.

The fearful catastrophe of the destruction of the "Maine" intensified an already growing feeling. The cool, dispassionate statement of Senator Proctor, reciting the horrors which he had seen, more potent than all the tempestuous utterances of those jingo orators who shouted for war, but never enlisted, strengthened the conviction that something ought to be done. And then the varied interests which always hope to profit either pecuniarily or in the line of military or naval glory by any war kept steadily working toward the same result. Yet, while all these matters are to be taken into account in determining the causes of the war, the fact remains that the main thought—the officially declared purpose—was the relief of an oppressed people. And that purpose ought never to be forgotten. Whether facts were distorted, cruelties exaggerated, the real conditions misrepresented, whether, indeed, the emergency had arisen which called for interference, are matters which may be disputed and debated, but it should never be forgotten that the American people believed that the emergency had arisen, that humanity demanded interference, and undertook the war to put an end to cruelty and wrong and for the emancipation of a struggling and down-trodden people.

When the war had commenced it was waged as other wars, and this country struck where it could, and as hard as it could. We aimed at the solar plexus, and we hit it. The proud Castilian Corbett went down, and victory is ours.

Out of this war have sprung questions affecting the future history and policy of this country, questions condensed in that which I have selected as the title of this talk:

"The War With Spain; a Prophecy or an Exception?"

The questions which I wish to notice are two in number, and may be stated thus:

First—because we undertook the deliverance of the oppressed Cubans from the domination of Spain are we hereafter to assume the duty of forcibly emancipating all oppressed peoples or were the circumstances surrounding our interference in Cuban affairs such as to

make that simply an exception in our history and policy?

Secondly—are we to extend our dominion by force, purchase or otherwise over remote territory and enter upon that career of colonial expansion which has become the settled habit of the great European nations, or are we to remain content with our compact continental possessions and devote our energies to the development of our own resources and the building up of the United States of America within those limits along the lines of our past history?

The questions thus presented are vital and far-reaching. They are not to be settled dogmatically; by epithet or by denunciation; not by saying that what has been must be, and that changed conditions bring no change in duty or policy; nor, on the other hand, that because we are powerful, and can do so, it is destiny and duty that we should. Cant phrases do not change convictions or determine right, and the American people are not ruled by an epigram. Fortunately, these questions are being discussed without reference to party lines, and in the most earnest, patriotic and thoughtful manner by all.

Returning to the first question, it must be noticed that if the circumstances demanded any outside interference in the affairs of Cuba (and that they did the general concensus of opinion in this country asserted), then we were so situated that it would seem to have been our special duty to interfere; we were the near Samaritan. I know there are some who say that there is no duty of a nation as of an individual to act the part of a Samaritan; that a nation, although an aggregation of individuals, is somehow or other relieved of all obligations which rest upon an individual; that it is not only its privilege, but its duty, to be guided in all respects by selfishness; that no matter what cry of appeal may come from far or near, it is the nation's right to measure its duty, not by any questions of humanity, but by the mere rule of dollars and cents. To those who entertain such views of national right and duty any interference for the mere sake of relieving an oppressed people is necessarily an exception—one to be discountenanced and never followed.

A Moral Entity.

I do not agree with those views. A nation is, in my judgment, a great moral entity, expressing in its life the sum of all the moral obligations which rest upon its individual citizens, and so there are times in the history of every nation when humanity calls upon it to look beyond the mere matter of dollars and cents, and even at personal sacrifice to interfere in the affairs of other nations. And yet, because this national duty may sometimes arise, and when it arises should always be bravely met, it does not follow therefrom that there is a