

**IMPERIALISM, OUR NEW
NATIONAL POLICY: AN ADDRESS
DELIVERED BEFORE THE MONDAY
EVENING CLUB, JANUARY 9,
1899**

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Imperialism, our new national policy: an address delivered before the Monday Evening Club,
January 9, 1899 by James L. Blair

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JAMES L. BLAIR

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Dr. S. A. Green

IMPERIALISM

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By JAMES L. BLAIR.

WHEN this subject was selected an "imperialist" was understood to be one who believed in a national policy looking to the addition of an unlimited amount of foreign territory to the national domain. Since then, it has been observed that "imperialism" means "the spirit of empire;" that empire connotes supreme sovereignty—greater even than that of a kingdom. Hence, the term has been repudiated by all those who are not yet prepared to go the full length of absolutism, and now those who are in favor of retaining the Philippines prefer to be known as "expansionists."

At this time it seems likely that we are to acquire these islands, and since expansionists, agreed on the main question, are divided as to the method by which such newly acquired territory is to be governed, the discussion so far seems to point to some such arbitrary form of rule as to indicate a future policy best described by the term first selected; and hence it becomes material to consider whether or not such policy would be the part of wisdom.

The two principal reasons for the war with Spain were to free Cubans from the brutal inhumanity of Spain, and to enable them to

set up a free government ; the purpose to acquire further territory was expressly disclaimed. The President, on the 11th of April, 1898, said, in discussing the Cuban question: "I speak not of forcible annexation, for that cannot be thought of. That, by our code of morality, would be criminal aggression."

The active war with Spain ended in the signing of the protocol on the 12th of August, 1898 ; that instrument provided that Spanish sovereignty in Cuba should cease, that Puerto Rico and other Spanish islands in the West Indies, and an island in the Ladrões should be ceded to the United States ; and that the United States should hold the City of Manila, pending the conclusion of a treaty to determine the disposition of the Philippines.

To the ordinary observer it would seem that with the evacuation of Cuba by the Spaniards the purpose of the war had been accomplished. But it was explained that Puerto Rico was to be taken in lieu of a war indemnity ; that the island in the Ladrões was to be used as a coaling station and the question as to the future disposition of the Philippines was left open. When I say it was explained, I do not mean that the explanation came from the Administration. It is difficult to make explanations while you have your ear to the ground trying to find out what somebody else wants, so that explanations came from everybody except the Administration. When the treaty was signed on the 10th of December it was learned that, in consideration of \$20,000,000, Spain was to cede the whole of the Philippine Archipelago to the United States.

The treaty is now before the Senate for ratification, without any explanation from the Administration other than its own terms. The logical connection between declaring war for the purpose of liberating an oppressed people in Cuba and the acquisition of an immense tropical territory to be added to the national domain at a distance of some 12,000 miles from our seat of government is not clear. It may be remarked, however, in passing, that the latest information at hand is to the effect that Agoncillo, the representative of the Philippine Government in Washington has asked to be recognized by the United States as such, and to be accorded the same rights as other diplomats; that Aguinaldo, the leader of the Philippine Insurgents has declined to surrender Iloilo and other strongholds, claiming them by right of conquest from Spain, and that Gen. Otis, in command of the United States troops, has been ordered to take possession of that city peaceably if he can, but forcibly if he

must. This was ever the language of Austria to the Hungarian and Italian States; the kind of liberty which resulted from it to them is hardly desirable.

Contrasting this situation with the President's statement that "forcible annexation" would be "criminal aggression," suggests further reason for explanation.

The first question which arose in this controversy was as to the constitutional right of our government to acquire any foreign territory. Many able lawyers maintain that the government has no such power. The better opinion seems to be, however, that as a sovereign State it has. But even if we have not, there is no doubt that we may so amend our constitution as to acquire this power and so the argument is narrowed down to the question as to whether or not the proposed policy is a wise one.

At the outset of this question we are met by the assertion of those who believe in the expansion idea that it is no longer necessary to inquire whether we will or will not take this territory because the thing is already accomplished. It is ours, and it is simply a question as to what we are going to do with it. This proposition I deny, because under our constitution the President alone cannot complete a treaty; to become a law of the land the treaty must be ratified by the Senate. It is held by some that it is the duty of the Senate to ratify since to do otherwise would discredit our national representatives at Paris and the Administration. This view seems to me to be begging the question, and if it is the correct one, then we should discard our constitutional fiction and by amendment lodge the power of making treaties solely with the President. No harm could come from a rejection of the treaty for stated reasons. Whereupon the President could re-open negotiations and modify its terms in accordance with the will of the people as expressed through their representatives. The view that the President alone should have the treaty-making power would transfer the law-making functions of Congress to the Executive.

The arguments in favor of expansion are substantially as follows:

- We need more territory for our national development;
- England has demonstrated that a colonial policy is a wise one;
- That this particular territory is specially desirable;
- That its acquisition will extend our commerce and enrich our people:

That by taking this territory we shall get rid of our policy of isolation and take our place at the council board of the nations of the earth ;

That we shall be in better position to prevent the dismemberment of China ;

That the flag has been raised at Manila and where the flag has once been raised it must never be pulled down ;

And that since we have overthrown Spanish government in Manila a moral obligation rests upon us to retain the whole property so as to maintain order and prevent anarchy.

Let us examine these reasons in their order.

The total area of the United States and Alaska is 3,501,000 square miles.

The public domain at present is about 9,000,000 acres, and in addition to the public lands there are vast areas owned by individuals available for settlement at nominal prices. The ratio of population to territory is one person to every thirty acres or about twenty to each square mile. The entire population of Europe could be set down in the Mississippi Valley without producing a congestion of population. It is not apparent, therefore, that we need at the present moment to annex a million and a half acres situated in the China Sea, on this score. Would it not be better to buy, if we need it, contiguous territory from Mexico or Canada?

The colonial policy of England was a necessity. Her congested population, her great surplus product of manufactured goods, the importance of finding opportunities for investment for the great wealth of her people, are among the reasons why this is so. That policy in the beginning was accompanied by acute abuses and it is not as is so often asserted, the reason of her commercial supremacy, which is wholly due to the cheapness and merit of her manufacturers. The notion that trade follows the flag is an exploded one. Trade follows the price list ; and in the case of England the flag has followed her trade. Her merchants have penetrated to every part of the earth and her wars and acquisition of territory have followed upon the heels of attacks made upon her citizens trading in foreign lands. The notion that a nation must be conquered by force of arms in order that its trade may be secured is one of the oldest of fallacies. Moreover, the fact that Canada maintains a protective tariff duty against English goods and that Australia now purchases more goods from Germany than she does from England, would seem to indicate

that the ownership of colonies does not insure the retention of their trade. It is well known that England's colonies cost her more than their revenues; her colonial budgets have been the plague of her statesmen for generations; and Macaulay says that "Colonial Empire has been one of the greatest curses of modern Europe; and that its results have been "wars of frequent occurrence and immense cost; fettered trade; lavish expenditure, clashing jurisdiction, corruption in government and indigence among the people."

The Philippine Archipelago contains about 200 Islands of substantial size and in all about 1400, many of which are mere volcanic rock points jutting above the surface of the sea. There has never been a reliable census but its population is estimated at between 8,000,000 and 10,000,000 composed of about 5000 Europeans and the remainder of Malays, Chinese, Moslems and other savage and semi-civilized people.

Let us see what its commercial advantages are likely to be. In the ten years ending 1897 there were annually exported hemp and sugar to the value of about \$9,000,000, of which more than fifty per cent. came to this country. These are the only exports of any considerable value and of all the rest we had all we wanted. We could have had and we can have in the future every article exported if we are willing to pay for it. It is hard to see, therefore, how ownership will help matters unless we intend to force them to sell us their products at our own prices, just as we are making Spain sell us the islands at our valuation of \$20,000,000.

But it is said we will sell them more goods. It goes without saying we could have sold them everything they consumed, except what Spain compelled them to buy, if we sold cheap enough. We sell to the colonies of every other nation, in spite of protective tariffs, because we produce many of the cheapest and best articles of commerce. No artificial restrictions will long withstand the power of cheap and good manufactures. We can only improve on the present situation by coercing our new colonists into taking more goods at our own prices.

At the beginning of this question we must remember that we are pledged to maintain what is technically known as the "open door" in these islands. That is to say, we cannot, under the treaty, exclude Spain from trading with the Philippines for ten years, and, as many maintain, we are under obligation to permit England to enjoy the same advantages as ourselves, since our success in the