

**OUR NATION AND
HER NEIGHBORS**

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Our Nation and Her Neighbors by Washington Gladden

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War with Spain is no longer a dreaded probability, but a dreadful fact. Not even the formalities are wanting. As I write, the news comes that the House of Representatives has just passed the joint resolution declaring war, and that the deed was done in one minute and forty-one seconds. Who held the stop-watch we are not told.

In an emergency like this Chinese Gordon's philosophy helps a little. "It is a delightful thing to be a fatalist," he wrote; "not as that word is generally employed, but to accept that when things happen, and not before, God has for some wise reason ordained them to happen. We have nothing further to do when the scroll of events is unrolled than to accept them as being for the best. Before it is unrolled it is another matter." I am Calvinist enough to believe with Gordon that whatever happens is divinely permitted; and that through this war, against which many of us strove, God will cause the wrath of man to praise Him. This is not saying that He prefers to be praised in this manner. If the wisdom and the justice of man would work out the same results, doubtless they would better

please Him and more abundantly honor Him. And we may well believe that whatever good results are to be gained as the issue of war might have been gained without war, if the people of our nation, and especially the Congress of the United States, had possessed a little more dignity and strength. Great have been the gains of just war, but it is Ulysses Grant who has testified: "Though I have been trained as a soldier, and have participated in many battles, there never was a time when, in my opinion, some way could not have been found of preventing the drawing of the sword." If we, the stronger party in this quarrel, had had a little more patience and steadiness of purpose, we might have compelled a peaceful settlement of this question, by which the horrors now existing in Cuba would have been abated and the island made free. It is true that the resources of our own diplomacy had been exhausted; but with such reports as our consular agencies have furnished us, with such a confession of the failure of autonomy as that of the De Lome letter, and with such a demonstration of the inability of the Spanish to rule as the destruction of the Maine presented, we could have gone before the great Powers and have compelled them to agree with us that Spain had forfeited her right to rule in Cuba. I believe that if the President had been allowed to follow his own judgment he would have worked out the problem for us without the loss of life and with far greater honor to the nation than can be won in a successful war with Spain. But the

temper of Congress forbade further negotiation, and swept the administration onward to war.

It may be said that delay was intolerable because the Cubans were starving. But, in truth, the prospect of speedily relieving their suffering would have been better if war had been delayed. The work of relief has now come to a pause; how soon it can be resumed no man can tell. If considerations of humanity had been always paramount, we should not have been unwilling to wait a little, before drawing the sword, that the starving people might first be fed.

It is not, however, profitable at this date to discuss this question of what might have been. It is not the Congress that might have been with which Providence and President McKinley had to deal, but the Congress that is. With this Congress no other result was possible. It was not, primarily, with the wisdom and justice of man that the problem had to be solved, but with the wrath of man.

There is large room for indignation in this business; it plays and it ought to play an important and decisive part; but if it had been more perfectly under the control of reason the issues would have been more benign. And one must confess, with a heavy heart, that several of the performances which the world has witnessed in the Capitol at Washington, since this matter was under consideration, are not reassuring to those who wish to see a rational and just solution of our difficult problems. More than once we have been forced to stop and ask ourselves whether

the moral elevation of our national legislature were such as to qualify it for the task of administering doctrine, reproof and correction in righteousness to the other nations of the earth.

That Congress, in this headlong zeal for war, reflected the sentiment of vast numbers of our people is not to be denied. And while this passion is by no means unmixed with baser elements, yet the prevailing motive is a generous sympathy with a suffering people, and a righteous resentment against cruelty and oppression. The passion might well have been better restrained, but it is not altogether unholy. At any rate it is the force that the Almighty is using to accomplish His purpose. Some may doubt whether any other force would have sufficed, but that must not be asserted. Doubtless if we had been a braver and a wiser people we might have done Spain more good and ourselves less harm. It must needs be that retributions come, and Providence must use such tools as men furnish Him; but if the hand that deals the blow is guided by brute passion more than by firm reason, neither the smitten nor the smiter gains the highest benefit.

That the end of this struggle will witness the expulsion of Spain from the island of Cuba is not, I think, doubted by any of us. The struggle may be more or less fierce and prolonged, but this is the issue to which it will come. And this will be a just retribution. So far as Spain is concerned, the ethical judgment of mankind will testify that she has got her deserts. She has abundantly proved her unfitness to rule her

colonies; her domination has been harsh, oppressive, ruinous; one by one her possessions on this side of the sea have revolted, but in all this experience she has learned absolutely nothing; the same tyrannous, exacting, brutalizing policy has been maintained for four centuries. The fact that Cuba has been in a condition of chronic insurrection for fifty years is itself sufficient to close the case against Spain. If, after three centuries and a half of her rule the Cubans were so turbulent and unreasonable that they would not live peaceably under her government, that is a demonstration of her fatal incapacity to govern them. That Spain has richly earned the punishment which she is now about to suffer cannot be gainsaid. It is the logic of history, it is the law of God, that great opportunities, misused or disused, are taken away from men and nations. Spain had a great opportunity of civilizing the Western Continent. The rights of discovery were hers, the most and the best of the territory passed under her power. So weak and oppressive has been her rule that it has nearly all been torn from her; only to Cuba and Porto Rico of all her vast western possessions does she now set up any claim.

This prolonged catastrophe of decaying dominion is not an accident. Long years ago Spain put out her own eyes and has ever since been stumbling in the darkness which she created for herself. The Inquisition was a crime that could not go unavenged. It was an attempt to exterminate independent thought and rational

leadership, and the history of Spanish decay and misrule shows how deplorably successful the attempt has been. This last long struggle with the existing insurrection in Cuba, in which Spain has proved herself powerless to restore order, impotent for everything except the wholesale murder of hundreds of thousands of innocent women and children, is the final and complete exhibition of her incapacity to rule. The conduct of Spain in Cuba up to date is a crime against civilization, and it is about to be punished by her expulsion from the island.

So much might be said by any unprejudiced onlooker; what is about to happen might seem to him the vindication of the righteous rule of that Providence which rendereth to men and nations according to their works. But the people of the United States, who are to be executioners of this decree, have another interest than that of the unprejudiced onlooker. To us it has become a very serious question; our sympathies are stirred, our moral feelings are aroused, and the time for action has come. We claim that our right to intervene is indubitable. Spain has maintained a national nuisance near our front door for a good many years; we have exhausted the resources of neighborly remonstrance and now we propose to abate the nuisance. The constant sight of unspeakable cruelties has become intolerable; we will endure it no longer. Evidence has accumulated that Spain has forfeited her right to Cuba; therefore, before the bar of the eternal justice we require her to leave the island.

The incident of the *Maine* greatly complicated this question. The first effect of that terrible tragedy, in just minds, was to check the onset of intervention. It seemed at first incredible, even monstrous to assert that Spain had any agency in that ghastly business. It must have been an accident. Instead of permitting ourselves to be inflamed and excited against Spain by the occurrence, we felt ourselves bound to guard our minds against even the suspicion of foul play. Because we had a controversy with Spain we would not permit ourselves to accuse her of such a crime until the evidence compelled us. It is a bitter thing to say that the evidence has been too strong for us. Scientific experts who have examined the testimony taken by the court of inquiry tell us that the ship must have been destroyed by a mine; the mine must have been planted there by Spanish officials; the ship was moored over it by Spanish officials; none but Spanish officials could have had access to the keyboard by which it was exploded. That the authorities at Madrid or the Captain General of Cuba gave orders for this destruction is not credible; but the kind of rule which Spain has been maintaining in Cuba makes deeds like this possible, and renders her powerless to prevent or punish them. Spain could have found the miscreants who perpetrated this wholesale assassination before now if she had tried to find them; we have heard of no attempt to detect or punish them. The attitude of the Spanish government in presence of this tragedy has completely sealed