

**THE UNITED STATES IN THE
ORIENT, THE NATURE OF
THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM**

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The United States in the Orient, the nature of the economic problem by Charles A. Conant

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PREFACE

THE United States have recently assumed serious responsibilities in the Orient. While the manner of their assumption had something of the appearance of accident, this country has only followed other civilized states in the general movement to find outlets for their surplus capital and the products of their labor. The United States have actually reached, or are approaching, the economic state where such outlets are required outside their own boundaries, in order to prevent business depression, idleness, and suffering at home. Such outlets might be found without the exercise of political and military power, if commercial freedom was the policy of all nations. As such a policy has not been adopted by more than one important power of western Europe, and as the opportunities for the sale of the products of

American labor and the investment of American capital under conditions of equality of opportunity are seriously threatened by the policy of some of these powers, the United States are compelled, by the instinct of self-preservation, to enter, however reluctantly, upon the field of international politics.

The present volume does not undertake to discuss all aspects of our position in the Orient. It is concerned chiefly with the economic aspects of the subject, and not with its ethical or political aspects. Upon the ethical side, of the right of a higher civilization to extend its sovereignty at the expense of a weaker one, volumes have been written, and will continue to be written. It seems sufficient to note here that the English-speaking races are preëminently practical rather than severely logical. They do not permit themselves to be carried by a syllogism to extreme conclusions. The argument made by our fathers more than a century ago in favor of "the consent of the governed" was not meant by them to include

universal suffrage, or to exclude sovereignty over annexed territory. This is the stubborn testimony of their acts. Reduced to its real meaning in the minds of the men who uttered it, their declaration meant that self-government should not be denied to those who were competent to exercise it for their own benefit and that of society. The attempt to read into their words meanings which they did not bear in the minds of those who uttered them, in order to carry an abstract theory to a merciless conclusion, after the manner of the philosophers of the French Revolution, is not in accordance with the sober adaptability to conditions as they find them which has ever marked the historic progress of the English-speaking peoples. American liberty, like English liberty, has been a plant of slow growth. It is not adapted to being torn up by the roots and transplanted in its entirety to foreign soil. The government of the United States, in seeking to establish orderly government in the Philippine Islands, with the limitations

which grow out of conditions as they are, and refusing to make promises for future generations, which might not be fulfilled, would seem to be pursuing a wiser course than to expect the people of those islands to set up an ideal republic on a soil where even local self-government has hardly taken root, and where the sanctions of order and justice which promote industrial development are scarcely understood.

This problem of new markets, and the author's discussion of it, has sometimes been represented as a problem of capital and not of labor; but it is in fact of vital interest for the American laborer. Labor is perhaps more directly concerned than capital that new markets and new opportunities for investment should be found to relieve the congestion of the old markets. The question is not whether American laborers can find opportunities for work under the tropical sun of the Orient, but whether they shall find such opportunities at home by the maintenance of adequate markets abroad for ab-

sorbing their great product of finished goods and saved capital. Only by keeping such markets open can these products be sold upon conditions which will keep labor steadily employed, afford encouragement for additional production, and open new fields of employment. A large demand for labor, whether for completing finished goods for sale abroad or for preparing the machinery of production and transportation for the development of backward countries, will react upon wages by compelling competing employers to bid for labor in a market where it is scarce, instead of choosing between the minimum bids of idle laborers competing under conditions disturbed by overproduction at home and closed markets abroad.

Upon the side of capital itself, the laborer is also interested, since he is one of the largest contributors to the great fund of savings which seek investment in remunerative enterprises. It is more important to him, so long as the present structure of society is preserved, that capital should yield high and