

San Francisco Examiner
January 14, 1900

The Survival of the Fittest

Tuesday's debate in the Senate between Messrs. Beveridge and Hoar appears to have set a number of persons reviewing their convictions on "expansion." The leading newspapers have "defined their positions" again, fortifying them with such new arguments as the debate suggested, or with the old ones stated in new ways. It is not likely that anybody's convictions have been overthrown, or even enfeebled. Amongst the benefits of discussion and controversy persuasion of error is not included. Heaven has still a monopoly of miracles. In the Congress of the future debates will probably be forbidden by law as unfavorable to a good understanding.

The lines upon which we are to fight out this matter of colonial extension (and the Philippine question means no less than that) are beginning to harden and define themselves. "Protagonists of expansion" are wasting little strength in showing how very constitutional and moral it is to hold on to what we have and take more, and their opponents are not as loud as once they were in declaring that in the Filipino we have caught a Tartar and in his insular habitat accepted a white elephant. That may be true; we have not yet subdued the former nor accurately appraised the value of the latter. It may be true, too, that it was wicked and un-American of us to extend our sway over a dissenting people, if as a people, they do dissent, which remains to be seen. What is obvious is a visibly growing disposition in each party to this dispute to ignore the arguments of its adversary, while actively building up its own. The one party serves a moral principle, the other a material interest. If an experienced observer were going to back the moral principle he would expect long odds.

In point of fact, the right-and-wrong of the matter is not so simple and obvious a proposition as it seems; gentlemen who favour retention of our conquest without regard to the feeling of the Filipinos or other than commercial considerations have a good deal to say for themselves. Admitting (for the sake of peaceful contention) that the seven or eight millions of intellectual delinquents inhabiting the known and unknown islands of the archipelago are bitterly opposed to American rule and devoutly attached to the golden principles expounded in our Declaration of Independence, it by no means follows that we are sinners for taking them into camp and subduing them to our sweet will. At one time I was myself of the opinion that it did follow; and I was ready to shed ink in support of that conviction. I don't think that way any more—at least I find that American rapacity has a good deal more to say for itself than I was willing to hear. The proverbial zeal of the new convert is unknown to me. I can still tolerate in another the faith that I once embraced, but it no longer serves me in place of a religion. I doubt if it altogether satisfies the fine spiritual yearning of Senator Hoar, or even the rude requirements of Colonel Bryan.

The world's large practical affairs are not ordered in a way to meet the views of clergymen and the angels. Commands for progress to progress are not issued from the quarter-deck of a Sunday-school. Yet progress does manage somehow to get ahead. If such civilization

and enlightenment as we have are desirable and their extension devoutly to be wished it is unwise to quarrel with the only practical method of extending them. We should not acclaim the end and denounce the means. Down to the present time the human race has found the incomparably best promoter of civilization to be the sword. That serviceable implement spreads the light on earth as a table knife spreads butter on a child's bread. The missionary can do something, the pedagogue a little more, the trader more than both; but it is to the soldier that they must look for their opportunity. The history of the spread and enlightenment is a history of military conquest. It was thus that Greece and Rome handed the torch to nation after nation before their own fires grew too cold to kindle it. It is thus that the mighty empire of Great Britain is girdling the world with great democracies, happy in her sway, and with autocracies whose conquered peoples enjoy, all unconsciously, the rights and liberties to which long privation has blinded their discernment. Wherever her flag goes civil and religious liberty, security of life, person and property, art, education, science and commerce follow and set up their benign reign. And it may be confidently predicted that if Dutch pretensions to dominance in South Africa be extinguished in blood the misguided peoples now so courageously seeking to avert their good fortune will find under the flag of their conquerors a prosperity, enlightenment and contentment which, under the grotesque tyranny of their own so-called republican governments, they have never known and never will know.

If a backward or savage people have in it the possibilities of civilization and enlightenment nothing better can occur to it than subjugation by any of the great military powers of today. The most powerful nations are the most advanced in all that we hold to be best for mankind, and in their own interest they impart to subject races as fast as these are fitted to receive it. Conquest for spoliation is a dead and discredited political faith; the great nations no longer hold colonies for the purpose of plundering them. The awful example of Spain is ever before their eyes like a finger lifted in warning. England attempted it in the case of her American colonies, and, losing them, has never attempted it again. Never since then has the imperial treasury heard the chink of a penny exacted by colonial taxation.

But not all the breeds of men have possibilities of civilization—a truth which the most advanced of them are curiously slow and reluctant to recognize. We understand easily enough that we cannot make a homing pigeon out of a tumbler or pouter; that we cannot train a Percheron horse to win races open to all horses; that all the education possible will not teach a bulldog to retrieve nor a dachshund to herd sheep; but we still believe, or try to believe, that we can “elevate” the negro, civilize the red Indian and Christianize the Chinaman. Can any one who knows the futility of all that, and of all the sentiment that clusters about it, doubt that the extinction of the incapable races distinctly augments the sum of human happiness? Is it not obvious to an attentive intelligence that the benign principle of the survival of the fittest implies and depends upon the effacement of the unfit?

We do not know what possibilities of civilization may inhere in the various mongrel races inhabiting the Philippine islands. Some have given evidence of a certain degree of susceptibility to enlightenment. Others appear to be hopeless, and of many we know nothing whatever. Of all it may safely be said that their only hope lies in subjugation by a master race. Such advancement as they may be capable of is not to be effected by suggestion and advice. Like all backward peoples, they fight against the light and will accept it, if at all, only when it is flashed upon them by the sword. To all such civilization is a bitter draught; to administer it we must catch them, hold their noses and spoon it into them despite their squirming and sputtering. Maybe it will kill them, as for example, it is killing the Hawaiians, a noble and blameless race

lamented by all who know them. Maybe it will do them good—let us hope that it will. In either case it will enlarge the area of enlightenment—increase its acreage—open up to higher and better influence another of the dark corners of the earth—augment the sum of human happiness.

We should remember that it is not a question of good or evil to a single generation. We are dealing with a matter of vital importance to “millions yet to be.” Directly and indirectly it concerns the interests of so incalculable a multitude of human beings that the effect upon the present generation of Filipinos and the present generation of Americans may be treated almost as a negligible factor in the stupendous problem. If our conquest should result in impoverishing and depopulating the entire archipelago, with whatever of mischief and demoralization that might entail upon ourselves, it yet might well be that there would be an enormous balance of general advantage before the inevitable day when our own civilization shall follow its predecessors into oblivion, leaving not a vestige behind.