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War Topics

A half-dozen "millionaires" of New York are said to have "sounded" the government as to whether it will accept a battleship to be built and presented by them. All railway employees are to be asked by an association of their fellows to contribute to the building of a battleship for presentation to the government. It is proposed that the school children of the country shall assess themselves ten cents each to build a battleship for the navy. These are significant "movements"; whether they come to anything or not, and whether or not they are followed by other projects of the same kind, they show a distinct trend of public opinion toward making this nation a first-class seapower. This tendency is not altogether a creation of the war, though that has given it a long push forward. We have been privileged to observe it for some years in the popular pride in the Navy and the satisfaction in each addition to it; in the whole country's delighted acquiescence in Mr. Cleveland's extension of the Monroe doctrine, entailing incalculable responsibilities, in the project for annexation of Hawaii. The sip of naval glory which the redoubtable Dewey has given us by his astonishing performance in Manila harbor has sharpened our thirst for more of that intoxicant than Spain has in stock for us.

That we shall add the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and eventually Hawaii to our possessions is as nearly "manifest destiny" as it is given to anything to be in a world from which design and fate have not expelled chance. All this means an increasing increase of our navy. If eager to grasp we must be strong to keep. Already we have a foretaste of the disadvantages of the new policy; we must send to the Philippines a force sufficiently strong not only to take them from the Spaniards, but from the Malays afterward. Indeed, we need not be surprised to hear of American soldiers and sailors fighting amicably side by side with the Spanish garrison of Manila to maintain our "lion's share." If the Philippine patriot knows upon which side it will in the end be to his advantage to throw the weight of his influence he is a wise Philippine patriot. Let us at least hope that in deference to this shorn lamb the gods will temper the wind of their hilarity. He looks funny from Olympus, but seen from his own point of view he is a rather pathetic figure—at present. He may look differently by-and-by, when stubbornly resisting our application to him of those principles of government which forego "the consent of the governed."

I wish my good friend and collaborator, Edward Cahill, would consent to waive the advantages of pitching into me while we are both striving with all the strength of our chins to defeat the Spaniard. It is disagreeable to be thwacked about the muzzard by one's ally for apparently no better reason than that the common enemy is putting up an insufficient fight. True, I said a good word for England, and Mr. Cahill is an Irishman—a most distressful one, I admit, but I'm sure it would be better not to pitchfork into this simple American-Spanish war the several various questions vexatae which are the Emerald Isle's modern substitutes for the snakes expatriated by St. Patrick. Still, I do not so much mind the swish of the shillelagh every time an

American in America ventures to say a friendly word of his "kinsmen over the sea" as, in this instance, the inconsiderate choice of cranial "bumps" upon which to bring it down. Mr. Cahill may whack away at me for my general unworthy to the satisfaction of his mind and heart (neither of which is really bad) and may even impress me with an aching sense of the imperfections of my adjectives, and I shall not greatly mind, but when he impugns my knowledge of snakes he has me up and doing right away. I attempted to explain a movement of an army thus:

"Imagine a snake lying in a path, its head to the north, imagine the doubling movement that it must make in order to bring its head to the south without moving.

Mr. Cahill says that he cannot imagine that, of which I am downright sorry, for I'm rather proud of that illustration—and of Mr. Cahill's imagination, too, as I have hitherto had the happiness to see it manifest in his poetical works. Perhaps I can make it clearer by explaining that to "bring" does not always mean to "fetch." For example, two men may be "brought" into relations with each other by a letter, without either having been moved. In my illustration it is a movement of the snake's body which brings its head to the south. Any one doubting the possibility of such a movement may have his doubt removed by grasping the tail of a snake disappearing into a hole; it will be an instance of the grasper grasped, the head of that thoughtful reptile having remained on guard just within the mouth of the hole. If St. Patrick (whom Heaven rest!) had limited his activity to the pulpit all this explanation would have been needless; Mr. Cahill would have known as much about snakes as anybody, and from contemplation of their virtues derived a nice joy than rewards the most austere constancy in wearing of the green.

Mr. Cahill's frankly confessed inability to "make head or tail"—even snake head or snake tail "of all the accounts of any battle on land" saddens, but I note with sympathetic pleasure his familiarity with the standard picture of it—the rearing charger topped by a sword-waving general encouraging a corporal's guard. It is a good picture, which age cannot wither nor custom stale. But I should like his judgment on the prevalent pictures of sea-fights. In this instance one picture does not serve through many centuries for an incalculable multitude of battles uniformly glorious, for whereas men, generals and horses preserve a nearly constant norm, there are fashions in thunder-boats. Still all these pictures have remarkable features in common, and the one that happens to lie before me combines them in a pleasing whole. It is by Mr. Coulter who, I am told, is a distinguished "marine artist," and can draw fresh water as well as salt. It represents Commodore Dewey's fleet passing Corregidor island on its way into Manila harbor. The island is about two ship-lengths in diameter, the strait through which the fleet enters having about the same width. That makes pretty close fighting. The island mounts ten guns, all firing at once, most of them over the mastheads of the ships, toward friendly batteries similarly diligent on the opposite shore. The guns are about one hundred and fifty feet long, and are automatic. It is one of Mr. Coulter's charming "mannerisms" not to man his guns. Commodore Dewey's ships are in line about fifty feet apart all firing. They are at no small disadvantage, for they are streaming up a pretty steep grade and they probably fire in order to unload themselves for the climb. The ramparts of the shore batteries are of an estimated height of one hundred feet, and about twenty feet thick, the guns being simply laid across them and held there by the will of God. All are in eruption. On the same page that displays this admirable and lively picture is an account of the engagement which it represents. From that it appears that the forts fired only two guns, both after the fleet had stolen by in the darkness.

In an even larger and livelier picture on the same page Mr. Coulter is good enough to give us his enlightened conception of the engagement at Cavite. This has all the "features" of the other—ships sailing grandly up hill and down, forts of well-curb shape as high as a hotel, with gigantic guns planted, like fence-posts, in the middle of the parapets, directed straight upward at the zenith and firing without human agency—all the modern military conveniences. Probably it would be impossible to convince the editor of a newspaper that it is not better to have a ridiculous picture than none, but surely he ought to know that it is better to have a good picture than a ridiculous one. It must be possible to obtain artists who would rather experience the pangs of famine than draw what they don't know anything about; and such would surely know all about more things than tdo the complaisant idiots who will set their clumsy hands to anything. Fancy the artistic status of a man who has, for example, never observed that in whatever direction, with reference to the spectator, a ship is sailing on a smooth sea, her masts appear vertical, as they are. Mr. Coulter and his kind pay the penalty of such delinquent observation by making some of their maneuvering ships appear to be going up hill and down. I say their "ships," but perhaps they are not ships, and what seems to be meant for a naval engagement is really a five o'clock tea, or a cowscape at milking time.

The war correspondents are very good to give us so many glorious victories, though somehow we seem to profit but little from the victories given. That was "a famous victory" at Matanzas, for example. True, nobody on either side was hurt, despite the "terrible accuracy" of the American fire, which was seen (by the correspondents) to blow entire garrisons into the air, fearfully and wonderfully dismembered; but it was a victory because the forts were "silenced." At San Juan the forts were not silenced, and the ships were, but it was a great victory, quite the same. So is every affair in which our ships perform the solemn military rite of "shelling the woods." The woods are still there, but it is thought that they must eventually surrender.

The frozen truth is that up to the time of writing (Saturday morning) success has rewarded the American arms but twice: we won a great battle in Manila harbor and succeeded in landing a few arms for insurgents at Cabanas. We were sharply repulsed at Cardenas and San Juan, and have apparently scored a failure at Cienfuegos. In brief, the war is presenting the usual irritating feature of two-sidedness. All this jubilant shouting for victory after victory is very courageous and loyal, but here, as elsewhere, no good substitute for truth has been found, and the question is still open whether it is really patriotic to be silly.

Why should the privilege of being shot appertain to, and be coterminous with, a condition of notorious personal morality? Why must the United States Army of today—even the volunteer contingent—be composed of lambs, angels and saints? They are no better fighters than we sinners. If the military standard of respectability had been as high during the civil war as some solemn hypocrite has made it now the soldiery of the sensible South would have swarmed all over us. A fellow can't get into this war unless he has a certificate of all the virtues, signed by a majority of the freeholders in his precinct, and is pronounced pious by his pastor. Why, if the best fighters in my old company were spaded out of a half-hundred Southern battlefields, their lives restored and their youth renewed, they would be contumeliously rejected at the recruiting station for moral unfitness to stop Spanish bullets! They were a bad lot in an incalculable number of ingenious ways' but they could everlastingly lick ten times their weight of the churchly dudes and psalming eligibles of this degenerate day. Pah! A soldier should be able to quaff great bumpers of brandy, swear good mouth-filling oaths and play a famous game of cards to win his

comrade's monthly wage. He should know how to loot a farm, sack a town and harry the thrifty civilian generally, "without regard to political affiliations." He ought not to be so respectable that his officer would hesitate to buck-and-gag him on occasion, or whack him on the pate with the flat of a sword; for what a soldiers needs is amenability to discipline, like the nigger with "obedience" writ large in every black corpuscle of the blood of him. What's the sense in having soldiers that you'll blubber about when they are shot" My notion of a perfect soldier is one that is capable of a double service—in his life and in his death. When General Picton ordered a memorable charge in the words: :Now, then, you drunken, plundering scoundrels, come along," they came along in a way to justify and illuminate the faith herein expounded.

The "bearin's" of the foregoing remarks are found in the application. At the Preston School of Industry at Ione I recently had the happiness to make the acquaintance of a company of young criminals to whom the State is giving a military education. What for? I found them all eager to enlist to fight Spain. Why not? They will soon be too old to be sent to the school, and will expiate their subsequent offenses in the state prison, toward which they are manifestly and consciously headed. My hopeful friend, Superintendent Hirschberg, cherishes a believe that he can keep them out by making them good, but I think they are under no such illusion themselves. They don't wish to be good; they wish to kill Spaniards. They would do it, too, in right good shape, and I should like nothing better than to command them if Major Blair, their present commandant, did not care to. With a view to that flowering and fruiting of my ambition I devised a project for their pardon and enlistment. I might as well have tried to get them into "society"! Wherefore, I am a disgruntled patriot and don't much care whether any of my fellow men of Spanish birth are killed or not. This country is getting too good for us old soldiers, anyhow, and we shall soon be sorry that, having saved it, we did not have then pensions laws so made that we could take it for ourselves.