

TRIUMPHANT PLUTOCRACY

The Story of
American Public Life
from 1870 to 1920

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from South Dakota



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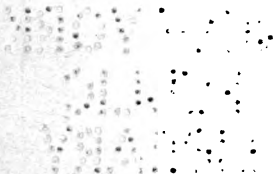
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XXVI. BENEVOLENT ASSIMILATION

During the five eventful years that intervened between the Hawaiian Revolution and the passage of the treaty of annexation, I did all that a man could do to prevent the American people from taking this fatal step. As a reward for my efforts I was denounced, vilified and condemned. The lawyers in the Senate, representing the business interests that were seeking the ratification of the treaty, put everything possible in the way of my work. Still I succeeded in blocking the ratification of the treaty for five years. Then came the break with Spain. When the Spanish War fever swept the country I knew that the fight on the Hawaiian Treaty was lost. Since that day in July, 1898, when the Hawaiian Treaty was ratified, for twenty-two years I have watched the progress of the United States along the path of empire. Through these years, likewise, I have done what I could to bring the real facts of the situation to the attention of the American people. It may be too late to save them from the fate that hangs over them, but at least I want them to know where they are going, and why.

I want the American people to know what to say when they are told that United States business men and United States soldiers are in the Philippines, Porto Rico, Santo Domingo and Panama to bless the inhabitants of these countries. I want them to know that it is an oft-repeated story—the plea of “helping the backward nations.”

The cry that we have entered upon our imperial course in order to benefit the native populations in the lands that we have conquered or annexed is an old one. Dickens personified it splendidly in his character, the Reverend Mr. Chadband. Dickens' description of the encounter between the reverend gentleman and a street waif is as follows:

“Stretching forth his flabby paw, Mr. Chadband lays the same on Jo's arm and considers where to station

him. Jo, very doubtful of his reverend friend's intentions and not at all clear but that something practical and painful is going to be done to him, mutters, 'You let me alone. I never said nothing to you. You let me alone.'

"'No, my young friend,' says Chadband, smoothly, 'I will not let you alone. And why? Because I am a harvest laborer, because I am a toiler and a moiler, because you are delivered over unto me and are become as a precious instrument in my hands. My friends, may I so employ this instrument as to use it to your advantage, to your profit, to your gain, to your welfare, to your enrichment. My young friend, sit upon this stool.'

"Jo, apparently possessed by an impression that the reverend gentleman wants to cut his hair, shields his head with both arms."

How well Dickens knew human nature! How characteristically he describes the crafty gentry who use fair words to cover up foul deeds. Had he lived today and watched the practice of American imperialism, he would have been satisfied to let Mr. Chadband give way before his betters.

I have before me McKinley's proclamation to the Filipinos, and I have placed it side by side with a proclamation of the King of Assyria, written eighteen hundred years before Christ. A man would think that McKinley had plagiarized the idea from Assurbanipal.

Ragozin, in his History of Assyria, gives a literal translation of a proclamation issued by Assurbanipal to the people of Elam. The Elamites had gone to war. Rather, their country had been invaded by Assurbanipal's forces, which had overrun the land, cut down the trees, filled up the wells and killed the inhabitants. Assurbanipal captured the capital city of the Elamites, killed their king, took 208,000 of their people into captivity as slaves, drove off most of the cattle belonging to those that were left, and then sent them this affectionate greeting:

"The will of the king to the men of the coast, the sea, the sons of my servants.

"My peace to your hearts ; may you be well.

"I am watching over you, and from the sin of your king, Nabubelzikri, I separated you. Now I send you my servant Belibni to be my deputy over you ; I have joined with you, keeping your good and your benefit in my sight."

McKinley writes to the Filipinos :

"Finally, it should be the earnest and paramount aim of the administration to win the confidence, respect and affection of the inhabitants of the Philippines by insuring to them in every possible way the full measure of individual rights and liberties which is the heritage of a free people, and by proving to them that the mission of the United States is one of benevolent assimilation, which will substitute the mild sway of justice and right for arbitrary rule. In the fulfillment of this high mission, while upholding the temporary administration of affairs for the greatest good of the governed, there will be sedulously maintained the strong arm of authority to repress disturbance and to overcome all obstacles to the bestowal of good and stable government upon the people of the Philippine Islands."

This reads very much like King George III of Great Britain, who said, with reference to the rebellious American colonists :

"I am desirous of restoring to them the blessings of law and liberty equally enjoyed by every British subject, which they have fatally and desperately exchanged for the calamities of war and the arbitrary tyranny of their chiefs."

Every conqueror, every tyrant, every oppressor, utters just such pious phrases to justify his course of action. The English-speaking people are particularly adept at this form of hypocrisy. Each act of aggression, each new expedition of conquest is prefaced by a pronouncement containing a moral justification and an

assurance to the victims of the imperial aggression that all is being done for their benefit.

What are we about in the United States? Why this rush to control the Philippines, Haiti, Costa Rica? The answer can be given in one word—exploitation! It is the search for markets; the search for trade; the search for foreign investment opportunities that is leading us to the South and to the East. The plutocracy is after more profits—that is the cause behind American imperialism.

The imperialists' aim is to assimilate, not the people of these possessions, but their lands and their wealth. If the people will work, the American plutocrats will exploit their labor as well as the resources of their respective countries. If the people refuse to work, they will be brushed aside, and men and women who will be more amenable to discipline will be imported from some other country to take their places. Who was responsible for the Hawaiian revolution and for the subsequent annexation to the United States? The American and other capitalists who had gained possession of the best land on the islands. What interests led the State Department to interfere in Haiti and in Nicaragua? The same business forces. Imperialism is imperialism the world over. Occasionally it is sufficiently enlightened to have some regard for the welfare of the exploited populations. At other times it is as blind and ignorant and ferocious as the policy of the British imperialists in China.

I spent a portion of the year 1898 in China and Japan, traveling extensively over both empires. At first hand, and from the best authority, I learned the policy that the British Government had pursued with regard to the traffic in opium, and I submit it as an excellent example of the way in which the empire builders act where they have an opportunity to make profits out of the wretchedness and suffering of a weaker people.

In Peking, I had several conferences with Li Hung

Chang, who was then an old man, having been the virtual ruler of China for very many years under the Empress Dowager. In one of the conferences I asked Li Hung Chang why he did not stamp out opium smoking in China. He replied that he could not because the English Government refused to allow the Chinese to interfere with the trade. He then told me that in some of the provinces of China (for China is divided into a number of States) the Governors were raising poppies and making opium, in order to beat the English out of the trade in China. He said that he had tried to secure an agreement with the English under which he was to stop the raising of poppies in China provided the English would stop importing opium. This he had been unable to do, as the trade in opium was an English monopoly conducted by the Government itself.

According to his statement, the English had set apart a million acres of the best land in India for the purpose of raising poppies, and had compelled the people of India to raise the poppies and sell the product exclusively to the English Government. The English had built a factory to manufacture the opium, and every package that left the factory was decorated with the coat of arms of Queen Victoria. Opium was little used in China until the English introduced it early in the nineteenth century. The Emperor had protested against the opium trade, but the English Government insisted upon its right to sell opium to the Chinese. Finally, the Emperor of China sent his men aboard some English ships that were lying, loaded with opium, in the harbor of Canton and threw the poison into the sea. Seventy years earlier the American colonists had set the precedent for this Canton opium party by going aboard the British ships in Boston Harbor and throwing the tea overboard. Today the anniversary of the "Boston Tea Party" is one of the fete days of the people of New England. The British liked the exploit as little as the other, however, and they began a war with China (1840). This war, sometimes called the First Opium

War, went against China, and she was compelled to cede Hongkong to the British, to open four other ports to British trade, and to pay an indemnity of 5,525,000 pounds sterling into the British Treasury. The matter came in for a good deal of comment in Parliament, but eventually it was dropped.* In 1857 a new controversy arose, and the Emperor again undertook to exclude English opium, giving as the reason that it was destroying his people; that the drug was a deadly drug and was causing great injury, and he enacted laws making it a criminal offense for the people of China to smoke opium, or for anyone to import the drug. In connection with this campaign he confiscated the opium that the English had already imported and imprisoned the people who handled it.

England thereupon declared another war upon China which was called the Second Opium War (1858-1862). Again China was defeated. Canton was bombarded; Peking was threatened; and, after a disastrous struggle, the Chinese made a treaty under which several new ports were opened to British trade; a British Ambassador was received at Peking, and China paid an indemnity of 4,000,000 pounds sterling to the British. After each war, the British were able to bring opium into a few more Chinese ports.

Li Hung Chang spoke with great bitterness of this conduct on the part of a so-called Christian nation, and went quite largely into the question of the injurious use of opium. He also presented me with a copy of the treaty made between China and Japan after the China-Japanese War, which had occurred only a few years before I visited Peking. This treaty was written in English and Chinese, and the book handed me con-

* "Ashley even brought forward a resolution for the suppression of the opium trade, but withdrew it after a debate turning on the inability of the Indian Government to part with a revenue of 1,000,000 pounds sterling or more."—The History of England. Sydney Law and L. C. Sanders. Longmans. 1913, Vol. 12, p. 41.

tained Li Hung Chang's picture and autograph, and the entire record of the conversations held at Shimonoseki between the ruler of China and Count Ito, the representative of Japan.

The terms of the treaty compelled China to cede to Japan the Island of Formosa, which had an area of 13,000 square miles, and was inhabited by four million Chinamen. In the conversation which preceded this treaty, Count Ito asked Li Hung Chang why he did not stamp out the opium traffic in China, as he had promised to do at Tientsin ten years before. Li Hung Chang answered that he could not do it because the English Government would not allow it. "Furthermore," said he to Count Ito, "if you take the island of Formosa and stop opium smoking, it will result in a war with England." To this Ito replied: "That may be true, but we will stamp out opium smoking even if it does result in war."

When I heard that story, told impressively by a member of the race that had suffered such wrong at the hands of British imperialism, I could not help comparing it in my mind with the participation of America in the slave trade, and wondering what new infamies the imperialist policy in which we were then, and still are engaged, would lead us to in the course of the present century.

The British had nothing against the Chinese. They sold them opium because there was money in it. If there had been no profits in the trade there would have been no opium war. Our imperial ventures, like those of the British, are financial. We are in the imperialist business because it pays the plutocrats to be there.

I never realized this so completely as in the winter of 1900, when a delegation from Porto Rico visited the city of Washington for the purpose of having the products of Porto Rico admitted free of duty to the United States. The delegation came before the Committee on Insular Affairs, of which I was then chairman, and asked for a hearing. I therefore called the mem-

bers of the committee together so that they might hear the Porto Rican delegation present its case.

There were five members in the delegation—two Englishmen, two Spaniards and a Frenchman. I had one of the Englishmen take the stand first and asked him what it was he desired the Congress of the United States to do. He answered that the delegation desired to have the products of Porto Rico—sugar, tobacco and tropical fruits—admitted to the United States free of duty.

I then asked him. "Are you a citizen of the United States?"

"No," was his reply. "I am a citizen of England, but a resident of the United States."

"Are you going to become a citizen of the United States?" I asked. He replied that he was not.

I then asked what interest he had in Porto Rico. He answered that he owned 200,000 acres of land.

"You are working your land at the present time?" I asked.

"Not to any great extent," he replied. He then explained that the land could raise great crops of sugar that might very nearly supply the United States if the industry were encouraged by having the sugar admitted free of duty.

In answer to a question about the people that were occupying his lands in Porto Rico, the Englishman explained that they were "natives."

"Are they your tenants?" I said to him. "Do they rent the land from you?"

"Yes," he answered. "They live in single-room houses as a rule, elevated from the ground on posts, one post at each corner. As a rule the houses are from six to eight feet from the ground." He then told us how the natives built a floor on top of these posts and then made a palm-leaf hut in which they resided. For support they planted yams and dry-land bananas and raised chickens and pigs. They paid their rent for the

use of the land by a certain number of days' work on the Englishman's plantation.

To my question as to the character of the people, he replied that they were "good people." When I asked him whether they could read or write, he said they could not, since there were no provisions on the island for their education.

I then put the other Englishman on the stand. He told the same story. After that I questioned the two Spaniards and the Frenchman. They all owned several hundred thousand acres of land, which were being used more or less in the way already described. All spoke of the native inhabitants as "good people," as mostly white people, and as entirely illiterate.

I asked if there were any of the natives who owned their own land. All agreed that there were very few such.

After I had taken their testimony in full, and had showed up the enormities of the economic system then existing in Porto Rico, I told them that the hearing was closed; that as long as I remained chairman of the Committee on Insular Affairs they would get no legislation enacted admitting their product free of duty; that if I could have my way about it I would cancel their title to every acre of the lands of Porto Rico and make the title out to the people of the United States. That I would then give an inalienable title to every person in Porto Rico for all the land that he could actually use, and levy taxes upon them for the compulsory education of their children.

"What!" they exclaimed. "Take our property without paying us for it?"

"It is not your property," I answered. "The land of Porto Rico belongs to the people who inhabit it and who work it. I would not pay you a dollar for your pretended title or allow you to remain there for one day to exploit the inhabitants of that island or to hold a single acre of that land in excess of the amount actually occupied and cultivated by you in person."

Of course, when my term of office expired in 1901 these foreign highwaymen, waiting to prey upon the people of Porto Rico, returned to Washington and secured the legislation they desired. They also secured control of the Government of Porto Rico, and made arrangements for a large armed police force to preserve law and order. They also appealed to Congress to put a duty on Cuban sugar in order to prevent it from competing with Porto Rican sugar. They then returned to the islands and began their work of "economic development."

About the first thing they did was to cancel the leases of the inhabitants who occupied the land. Then they compelled them to work for wages, raising sugar and tobacco, and they refused them the use of any land to raise yams, bananas, pigs and chickens, and they fixed the wages at 50 cents a day in silver. Little provision was made for the education of the people, and the wages were so low that, with their large families, the laborers found it impossible to buy adequate food and clothing. Consequently, their children grew up without clothes—ran naked in the fields and even in the towns—and were put to work as soon as they grew old enough to be of use.

Shortly after this beautiful plan of "economic development" was put in effect, the owners of Porto Rico began to boast of the great things they had done for the people. They told how they had furnished employment; had put up the mills and factories and brought in the machinery to make the sugar out of the raw cane, and to manufacture the tobacco, so that Porto Rico exported \$150,000,000 worth of the product per annum to the United States. With it all, the miserable peons of Porto Rico went naked and starving in one of the richest spots of the whole world.

After the first few crops had been harvested, the laborers of Porto Rico went on strike, leaving the cane to sour in the field. Thereupon these foreign pirates, the English, the Spanish, the French and the American

planters, called in the police force and the armed men of the United States and shot up the strikers and arrested them and put them back to work in the fields—those they had not wounded or murdered. Thus, economic development pursued its imperial course in Porto Rico, where conditions are as bad today as they were when we took possession of the island twenty-two years ago, and always will remain as bad until the system of exploitation at home and abroad is abandoned and labor is given its just reward.

Lest anyone should think that I am exaggerating, I should like to call attention to a report recently published by the United States Department of Labor, giving a full description of the working and living conditions in Porto Rico. (Labor Conditions in Porto Rico, by Joseph Marcus, Washington, 1919.) The special investigator who wrote the report for the Labor Department, as a result of a careful study of conditions, states that:

The American flag has been flying over the island of Porto Rico for twenty years, yet the percentage of illiteracy is still abnormally high. During the years 1917 and 1918 "only 142,846 children out of a total of 427,666 of school age actually enrolled in the public schools." "The difficulty," says Mr. Marcus, "lies in the bad economic condition" in which the worker finds himself. "Porto Rico is an island of wealthy land proprietors and of landless workers. There is a law in Porto Rico prohibiting any single individual from owning more than 500 acres of land. * * * With the American occupation the price of cane land rose very high—from thirty to three hundred dollars per acre—and this induced many a small holder to sell his land and join the ranks of the laborers." Under the circumstances, the law limiting land holdings was not enforced, and at the present time "of the best land of Porto Rico, 537,193 acres are owned and 229,203 acres are leased by 477 individuals, partnerships, or corporations from the United States, Spain, France and other

countries." The total wealth of the island is in the hands of fifteen per cent. of the population. Fourteen per cent of the wealth is in the hands of native Porto Ricans. Sixty-seven per cent is owned by Americans. Four-fifths of the people of Porto Rico live in the rural districts. They build their little shacks on land that does not belong to them; they work when work is to be had on the nearest plantation; the men dress in a pair of trousers, a shirt and a straw hat. "Throughout the island thousands of children of the ages from one to seven years go naked, in the towns as well as in the rural districts."

When the laborer is at work he and his family share the following diet:

Breakfast—Black coffee, without milk, and quite often without sugar.

Lunch—Rice and beans, or rice and codfish, or codfish and plantins.

Supper—The same as lunch.

This diet holds good while the laborer has steady work, but, during a large part of the year—five or six months—there is no work. "How he pulls through the slow season is a mystery to many who are interested in the welfare of the laborer."

The Porto Rican laborer is a sick man. "Hookworm disease, anæmia, etc., are very widespread."

The low energy value of the diet, together with the prevalence of sickness, has so undermined the endurance of the Porto Rican laborer that a number of experiments in scientific diet, carried on by the employers themselves, resulted in increasing the working capacity of the men from 50 to 100 per cent. Mr. Marcus finds that, with an increase in wages which would enable the laborer to purchase some meat and dairy products, the charge of laziness and inefficiency, which is frequently lodged against the workers, might well be withdrawn.

The investigation upon which Mr. Marcus bases his report was made during the year 1919. At that time machinists in the sugar mills received about one dollar

per day. Laborers in the busy season were paid ninety cents per day; in the slow season seventy cents. The working day is from ten to twelve hours. On the tobacco plantations men's wages during the busy season are from sixty to eighty cents a day and, during the dull season, from forty to sixty cents a day. Women receive from thirty-five to forty-five cents a day in the busy season and from twenty-five to thirty-five a day in the dull season. On the coffee plantations wages are lower. Men receive from fifty to sixty cents per day in the busy season and from thirty-five to forty-five cents per day in the dull season.

Mr. Marcus reports that the needle industry is making considerable headway in Porto Rico. Men's and children's suits are manufactured by women operators who earn from three dollars and fifty cents to five dollars per week. Embroidery manufacturing, lace-making and drawing work pay from one dollar and twenty-five cents to four dollars per week. The work is done exclusively by women.

Detailed descriptions are given of living and working conditions in these and other industries. Enough has been said here to indicate very clearly that the American people, having assumed the responsibility for directing the lives of 1,118,012 Porto Ricans, are far behind the standard of "health and decency" which civilization prescribes as the minimum below which human beings cannot be expected to live and to work.

Here are two examples of the work of modern empires. Great Britain fought two wars in order to force the drug habit on China. The United States took Porto Rico away from its "Spanish oppressors" and then turned the island over to absentee landlords, whose sole interest in the island was to make out of it all the money they could. This is imperialism at its worst—hard, grasping, western imperialism. With it I should like to contrast an instance of imperialism among the "heathen" of the Orient.

Japan took the Island of Formosa from China about

1897. Formosa is a very fertile island lying off the coast of China in the Pacific Ocean. Its population is almost exclusively Chinese, and it has been a part of the Chinese Empire for over four thousand years. The inhabitants nearly all smoked opium which had been forced upon them by England as a result of the two "Opium wars." When Japan compelled China to relinquish her right to the Island of Formosa (she had already occupied the island during the war) she sent eight hundred surveyors to the island and surveyed all of the land in Formosa. When the survey was completed she made maps showing who occupied each tract and describing the title by which it was held.

The Japanese found that the land in Formosa was owned in great tracts by Chinese mandarins, most of whom lived over in the cities on the main coast of China, many of them in Amboy. The holdings of these absentee landlords were from 200,000 to 500,000 acres. On the island itself practically all of the 4,000,000 inhabitants were landless and were paying rent to owners who lived abroad. No provision whatever was made for the education of the Formosan children.

Japan at the same time registered every opium smoker in Formosa and ascertained the amount of opium he smoked each day. She also destroyed every poppy field in Formosa and built an opium factory and purchased the raw opium from the Indian (English) Government to supply the registered opium smokers each day with the amount they smoked. She then passed a statute making the raising of poppies a crime and making it a criminal offense for any person except a registered opium smoker to have any opium in his possession. Consequently, when all the registered opium smokers died off, opium smoking was wiped out all over the island.

Having surveyed the land and ascertained just who owned it, Japan passed a law taking the title of the Island of Formosa from the landlords and conveying it to the Empire of Japan. As compensation to the land-

lords, Japan issued 4,000,000 yen of Formosan trust bonds and divided these bonds arbitrarily among those who had owned the island. Then she gave to each farmer who tilled the soil in Formosa the land he occupied and used, as well as the improvements which he already owned, and accompanied this gift with a provision that the farmer might dispose of his improvements to any other person who actually used and occupied the same, or that his improvements might descend to his children. In the case of the land, however, he was denied the right to alienate any portion of it. The Japanese also established schools all over Formosa for the compulsory education of the people.

I cite these facts because they present a picture of imperialism at its best—as it was practiced by Japan—in contrast with imperialism at its worst, as it is practiced by Great Britain and the United States. At bottom, however, imperialism is imperialism and is the same in principle, wherever it is found.

After all, why talk nonsense? Why lie to others? Why seek to deceive ourselves? An imperial policy has as its object the enrichment of the imperial class. The plain man—the farmer, the miner, the factory worker—is not the gainer through imperialism. Rather the monopolist, the land owner, the manufacturer, the trader, the banker—who have stolen what there is to steal at home, devote their energies to the pursuit of empire because the pursuit of empire gives them an opportunity to exploit and rob abroad.

We annexed Hawaii, not to help the Hawaiians, but because it was a good business proposition for the sugar interests. We took the Philippine Islands because the far-seeing among the plutocrats believed that there was a future economic advantage in the East. For the same reason we are in Haiti, Costa Rica and Panama. Each step along the imperial path is taken for the economic advantage of the business men of the United States and at the expense of the liberty and the lives of the natives over whom we secure dominion.