

# The Public

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President McKinley has made the repulsive Spanish garrote an American mode of administering capital punishment. During the current week, this deadly instrument of torture was used in Puerto Rico, to kill five men convicted of murder. It was therefore used by American authority, upon American soil, under the sanction of an American president and the shadow of the American flag.

There is one military bill before congress which can be approved. It is a bill to provide for assigning retired commissioned and non-commissioned military officers to the public schools as military instructors. It would be an excellent thing to give all the public school boys a practical military education. This would not stimulate the military spirit especially. That spirit is apt to be strongest in those to whom military experience is a novelty. But it would qualify the great masses of the American people to fight effectively in defense when militarism shall have made revolution necessary.

If the reports from London have fairly described public demonstrations there, the British jingo is a comical brute. He goes into ecstasies of self-praise and patriotic declamation when 40,000 British troops capture 4,000 South African Dutchmen; and he tumbles into the depths of gloom when 10,000 Dutchmen begin to worry 40,000 British. If the British jingo would commune conscientiously a little more with his own soul about the wretched spirit of

conquest which has plunged his country into this totally useless and unjustifiable war, and plume himself less upon the valor of his representatives on the firing line, he might not be so comically picturesque, but he would be a wiser man and a better Briton.

A set of New Jersey officials prove their utter lack of any sense of responsibility by leasing to private parties a piece of riparian land, which is public property, for a period of 999 years at a fixed rental. As the land is to be improved at a cost of some \$3,000,000, it would be entirely proper to grant a long lease. But a lease for about the life of the perishable improvements would be long enough for all equitable purposes. No officials, no government, no people, has the right to tie up the affairs of succeeding generations further than may be necessary to preserve rights which the present generation justly acquires in the products of its own toil. A government lease of land for 999 years, like a government grant "while grass grows and water runs," is a usurpation.

Marshall Field & Co., one of the great mercantile concerns of Chicago, has listed its personal property at \$6,400,000. One-fifth of that amount, the basis of taxation under the Illinois law, would be \$1,280,000; and at the rate of 5 per cent. the tax would be \$64,000. Now does anyone suppose that Marshall Field & Co. will pay this handsome sum of \$64,000 and bear the brunt of the loss? Could any firm afford to take \$64,000 out of its profits for taxes? And whether it could afford it or not would it do it if there were any possible way of recouping? Evidently not. And as there is a way of recouping, Marshall Field & Co. will not lose this money. They will get it back in higher prices

for goods. So Marshall Field & Co.'s customers will pay that tax in the end. And what is more, they will pay Marshall Field & Co.'s profit on the tax. Yet many of these same people will speak of Field as a great tax payer and of themselves as non-tax payers.

In the Puerto Rican government bill, just passed by congress under tremendous party pressure, and which the president will certainly sign if he has not done so already, there is one exceedingly significant provision. Doubtless there are others as suggestive of loot, but this stands out prominently in that respect. The bill empowers the president of the United States to appoint the upper house of the Puerto Rican legislature. That is a scandalous provision in itself, for a republican congress to adopt. But the scandal does not stop there. This upper house, the mere creature of the president, is authorized in its own discretion, without any check upon its action, to grant franchises in the island. Reduced to its real meaning, that provision gives to William McKinley the power to distribute special privileges, thereby creating embryonic trusts, in the island of Puerto Rico. And he who doesn't believe that William McKinley will "stand by his friends" in making the distribution, little knows the true inwardness of the present occupant of the white house. Puerto Rico franchises will doubtless contribute in no small way to the \$6,000,000 campaign fund that Hanna is preparing to get together.

If the imperialists were sincere in their expressed anxiety to have the crown colony question passed upon by the supreme court they would not have prevented legal proceedings in the Jeorg Cruz case, which we reported last week. Jeorg Cruz came to

New York from Puerto Rico under a labor contract. The commissioner general of immigration, Mr. Powderly, stopped him under the contract labor law, and ordered him deported, whereupon Cruz was about to go into the courts. This would have made an excellent case for testing the question whether the constitution follows the flag. For if the constitution does extend of its own force over Puerto Rico, then Jeorg Cruz is a citizen of the United States, and Powderly had no power to send him back; whereas, if the constitution has no force in Puerto Rico, then Cruz is a mere Puerto Rican, a subject but not a citizen, and Powderly was right in deporting him. The administration should have welcomed this opportunity to ascertain from the supreme court whether or not "our new possessions" and their inhabitants are part of the United States or not. But it did nothing of the kind. As soon as Cruz gave signs of testing his rights of citizenship in the courts, Powderly had his official ears boxed by his superior for allowing the question to arise, and Cruz was turned loose to work out his contract. The administration merely reserved the right to deport him at some other time and to sue the person who had hired him. For this purpose the case was referred to the attorney general, in whose pigeon holes it will repose undisturbed forever and aye. The disposition of the Cruz case confirms the conclusion from other indications that the administration wants to keep imperialism out of the courts until one legislative and administrative act after another shall have so tangled up the question that the courts will shrink from deciding in accordance with the letter and spirit of the constitution lest their decision raise havoc with great vested interests and national and international relationships.

Hope has not been abandoned by the ship subsidy conspirators at Washington of accomplishing their purpose of looting the treasury before

congress adjourns. The subsidy bill has been amended in several particulars to avoid objections, but it is the same old steal yet. It is planned for the special benefit of the Standard Oil navigation company, known as the International, though incidentally it aims to provide luxurious ocean accommodations for European travelers and to facilitate the importation into this country of European laborers. To illustrate the tourist feature of the bill. A freight steamer would under the bill get a subsidy of \$4,740 for carrying a given cargo of American exports, while the swift passenger steamer St. Louis, of the Standard Oil line, would get, for carrying half that cargo of American exports, a subsidy of \$26,000. It is easy to see that this plan of subsidy provides for the encouragement of passenger travel and of exporting in the ratio of about \$11 to \$1.

One of the pettifogging pleas for this ship subsidy bill is the assertion that by encouraging American ship owning it would save millions to this country which are now paid by Americans to foreign ship owners in freights. Nothing is said specifically about the persons or classes to whom this expenditure would be saved. It is assumed, of course, that all American tax payers would share in the saving; else all American tax payers would not be burdened with the expense of effecting it. That is the theory. It is an assinine theory; but let it pass, while we briefly consider the notion that millions would be saved to this country in freights if we had a subsidized merchant marine. This notion was elaborately worked out by Winthrop L. Marvin in the Review of Reviews for March, in an article in defense of the subsidy measure. According to Mr. Marvin's estimates the people of the United States pay annually to foreign ship owners for freight, mail and passenger charges \$150,000,000. "No country but a very rich and prosperous one," he says, "could long do this; and such an expenditure has come to be a very

serious drain on our own immense resources." One is tempted to ask Mr. Marvin why he does not credit this amount to our favorable balance of trade. It would account for some of it. But since we avowedly receive a return in service for this outlay why consider the outlay a drain? Individuals do not regard expressage as a drain. It is a quid pro quo. And at any rate why is the freightage Mr. Marvin mentions any more a drain than our much greater balance of exports, for which we get, according to the treasury statistics, neither goods nor gold, neither silver nor service, but which is constantly referred to as evidence of prosperity?

If this shipping charge for our foreign trade is so heavy a drain, why is not the shipping charge for coastwise trade a ruinous burden upon our interstate commerce? Why is not the cost of internal waterway transportation a similar drain, only far more serious since the water freightage from Pittsburg alone is said to exceed that of New York? Why does not the item of railroad charges ruin all who have to go to railroads for transportation, especially when it is well known that some of our great railroads are chiefly owned by and controlled in the interest of foreigners to whom goes a very large percentage of the total of railroad dividends? The plundering ship subsidy bill and all the arguments for it are shining examples of protection greed gone to seed.

"We are still a debtor country," says the Springfield Republican, commenting upon the recent heavy purchase by foreigners of American stocks and bonds. "A debtor country!" Mark that. Yet our merchandise exports in excess of merchandise imports from October 1, 1834, to February 28, 1900, amounts to \$2,682,722,397. Mark that also! President McKinley says our excessive merchandise exports are all paid for in gold. But he is mistaken. During the same period of 65 years and 5