

WILL THE UNITED STATES INCUR AND PROVE EQUAL TO IMPERIAL RESPONSIBILITIES?

The policy which the United States will adopt towards Cuba, Porto Rico and the Philippines is unfortunately becoming a party question. As the Republicans are in power, the Democrats are, as usual, watching them in the hope of being able to secure some party advantage by whatever opportunity arises out of the settlement with Spain. The Republicans are generally in favour of what may be styled an imperial policy, involving the absolute annexation of Spain's conquered colonies. On the other hand, the Democrats oppose this policy, with some exceptions, their objection to it being, singularly enough, based not so much upon present expediency as upon respect to the opinions of the early presidents and statesmen of the Republic. It is remarkable to find a people who take the initiative so boldly in economic and social changes, who are prone to ridicule us and others for being so respectful of political traditions, paying such conservative homage to the ideas prevalent a century ago as to the principles which should control the governmental policy of a new country like the United States. But so it is, and the doctrines of Washington, Munro, and their contemporaries are being quoted as authoritative in regard to conditions of which they had no knowledge nor any acquaintance with circumstances at all analogous to those which now exist as a consequence of the war with Spain. While it is folly for a people to ignore the teachings of history, it is equally so to bind the present by irrelevant traditions. The United States cannot now be confined within the ring fence of a continental boundary. They have incurred imperial responsibilities, which the American people are too proud, too self-respecting and too honourable to shirk. There are some timid souls in the States who distrust the capacity of their country to govern dependencies. What small States like Holland and Portugal have successfully done for centuries, to say nothing of Great Britain, is surely a task within the power of the great American Republic. Some are even saying that a Republic cannot govern colonies; they forget that the Dutch Republic possessed splendid colonial dependencies, some of which were only wrested from Holland by the naval and military forces or the diplomacy of England. But some remain attached to that country, as Java, Madura, Western New Guinea, portions of Sumatra and other parts of the East Indies. Portugal, with a population much less than Canada, holds colonies as large as those which are falling under the power of the United States, which are peopled by races as difficult to govern as those of Cuba and the Philippines. Are Americans willing to admit their inferiority to the Portuguese and Dutch? As to the Constitution of the United States making no provision for colonial government, it may be said that the constitution of no country which holds dependencies provided for their administration prior to colonies being acquired.

A nation's Constitution is only the formal expression of a nation's will.

When the American people decide to hold and govern Cuba, Porto Rico and the Philippines, as we trust they will do, their determination will be reflected in a revised Constitution providing the machinery required for their government. What form this will take is a very grave question for the States, for those islands and all civilised powers. Will they be annexed by full incorporation into the political system of the Republic, or only treated as colonies in the same sense as the Crown colonies of Great Britain, of Portugal, of Holland and other powers? Were Canada to be annexed to the States—which she never will be—we should enter upon the full franchises of American citizens, as we are accustomed to liberty, and know its conditions. The Cubans, Porto Ricans, Philippenas, have never enjoyed any political freedom. For centuries they have had the iron hand of a despotism on them, not politically only but mentally. The mass of the people in those islands are as illiterate as when Columbus entered the waters of the West Indies in 1492, or Magellan discovered the Philippines in 1521. But other, and much weaker, nations have assumed, and kept supreme authority over semi-civilized colonists. If the United States confesses incompetency for one of the noblest duties of a civilized country, which is the development of a debased race by moral, educational and political influences, it will be an admission that its system of government is too narrow and too selfish to be of service as an auxiliary of Divine Providence in redeeming mankind from the blight of mental, moral and political degradation. After spending many millions of treasure and sacrificing hundreds of lives in a war of humanity to throw off the responsibilities incurred from a sense of self-distrust would be an act of cowardice which the Americans, in our judgment, are not capable of committing. If, however, party spirit drags the nation down to that level, the Republic will be covered with the obliquy and the reproach of the rest of the civilized world. What course then should the States take with their new dependencies? Clearly they cannot be made equal in political status to the States of the union. They will have to be governed like our Crown colonies, or those East Indian islands in which a native prince is the nominal ruler, but who is subject to the control of a Dutch Governor. The officials will have to be permanent ones, not changeable every four years. The Dutch tried the system of frequent changes in colonial officials, and suffered severely for so imprudent an experiment. For colonies in an early stage of political development the continuity of some definite policy is essential to progress, and even a faulty policy steadfastly pursued will have better results than a frequent succession of better ones which are abandoned ere they mature. The States must face the situation they have created, which, we venture to regard as a call of Providence to do a great