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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

THE WHITE SAVAGE AT WAR. It was Franklyn who wrote to Josiah Quincy in 1773 the famous dictum: 'There never was a good war or a bad peace.' Franklin's terse variant of old Erasmus' saying is, perhaps, a little too sweeping. But at its best war is devil's work. When it is—as in the Philippines—a war in which racial (and to some extent religious) passion runs high, Satan's imps are pretty sure to march thick with the rank and file of some regiments, and to ride at the head of others. In previous issues we have given instances of the savagery and brutality of the methods by which certain American officers and their men are forcing western 'civilisation' on the inhabitants of the Philippines. Many—perhaps the larger portion—of the American troops in the islands are undoubtedly men of high, or at least good average, moral calibre. But it is evident that many others of them are no better than the ragged rabble of ununiformed and undisciplined Bashi-bazouks whose atrocities in Bulgaria elicited one of the finest outbursts of the late Mr. Gladstone's torrential eloquence in the seventies.

Here are two samples of warfare as conducted by the white savage at large in the Philippines. The following is an extract from a letter published in the *Philadelphia Catholic Standard* of July 29, from a respected correspondent in the Philippines:—

The truth is, affairs here are being conducted in a scandalous manner. After six weeks' work in and around Manila I have seen enough to make me ashamed of my country's flag. In fact, this war here is no more nor less than an A.P.A. fanatical outburst against the religious customs of the island. I have seen so much that I do not know where to begin in reciting the story of profligacy, debauchery, and licentiousness which dominates the army of occupation. Women walking along the streets have had scapulars, rosaries, crucifixes, and so on—which, by the way, are all worn exposed—torn from their necks. Prisoners of war have been shot to save the trouble of bringing them into camp—and this by volunteer soldiers, without authority from any one. The Tennessee regiment had taken over fifty prisoners; when the detachment reached camp the question was asked as to where were the prisoners. 'They're on the road'—in fact the natives had been used as targets for the amusement of our nineteenth century 'evangelists.' No wonder we see native priests leading men in battle against our men. The churches have been the object of spoliation unheard of. Chasubles, stoles, chalices—everything of value, and consecrated articles of all kinds, are shown as trophies of victory. There is not one particle of exaggeration in these statements. Indeed, the motive of attack on certain places has been to rob the churches and plunder the natives. Our soldiers teach children on the streets unnameable filth and obscenity, and then another will come along and whip the child for its progress in infamy. Young girls have been ruined by the thousand, and to-day 'Marguerites'—God save the word—are seen publicly on the street—something unknown before Dewey accomplished his 'great victory' over a handful of wash-tubs that were in the shed for repairs. Daily occurrences are something appalling.

Even if we were to make a reasonable allowance for exaggeration, all this would be bad enough. Unfortunately, the statements of this writer are, however, corroborated by a vast amount of independent testimony from other quarters. The editor of the *Standard* says: 'Dreadful as these disclosures are, we are obliged to withhold other facts still more revolting.'

Here is another somewhat similar sample of war-news. It is taken from a letter written from the seat of war by Private Prendergast, U.S.I., and appeared in the *Ave Maria*:—

Villages and churches are in ruins as the result of our cannonading. One church presented a scene such as I have never before seen or heard of. The volunteers found the place just as the priest left, and so when these devils got in they completely

demolished everything. They even broke open the tabernacle and threw the Blessed Sacrament upon the floor; then they put on the vestments and marched into camp in a mocking manner.

It brought the tears to the eyes of many a Catholic boy to see such an outrage on the Church of his faith. But the volunteers didn't stop at this. They went to the vaults of the church, and, after breaking them open, threw the bodies in all directions, in their search for jewellery and other valuables. This alone is a disgrace to Uncle Sam, and the gallows is not half good enough for some of his soldiers.

A fine buzz of execration went up over the English-speaking world when some half-naked Samoan, unauthorised, hacked off the heads of two of the white men whom his fellows had killed in a stand-up fight near Apia. But, according to another American contemporary, the civilisers of the islands have been sending the embalmed heads of slain Filipinos through the Post Office sacks, for the use of students of comparative craniology. Which reminds us of the brisk traffic in preserved Maori heads that was at one time rampant in New Zealand.

Such methods of warfare afford an explanation of many things. They explain, for instance, the statement of the *New York Herald* that 'the non-combatant part of the Filipino population is hostile to the Americans.' They furnish one sufficient reason for the rigorous censorship of news sent out of Manila. One English war correspondent says:—

It is impossible to write the truth about the situation. The resources and fighting qualities of the natives are quite misunderstood by the American papers, and we cannot write the facts without being accused of treason; nor can we tell of the practically unanimous opposition to, and dislike of, the war among the American troops. The volunteers, or at least a portion of them, were at one time on the verge of mutiny, and unless General Otis had begun sending them homewards there would have been sensational developments. We have been absolutely refused all hospital facilities.

Just so. There has been a significant cessation of the cable-messages detailing crushing defeats and heavy slaughters of Filipinos at the expense of a few wounds or scratches to the American troops. For 'the boys' are coming home. The Nebraskas left home last year 1100 strong. Only 280 came back. And so of the others. The *New York Herald* published a message that was somehow smuggled through after having been suppressed at Manila. It states that the American troops in hospital in the Philippines number 4,000; that Manila and its suburb Cavite between them require 16,000; that 4,800 are scattered among the smaller islands; and that only 8,000 out of nearly 33,000 are available for active campaigning, and some of these are overworked and can do little else than remain on the defensive. We long ago expressed the opinion that Uncle Sam would get many a bad headache and many a sleepless night before his conquest of the Philippines was an accomplished fact. Events have fully justified our prediction. The reduction of the islands is apparently as far off as ever. Uncle Sam has found his Majuba Hill. And he owes little gratitude to the loud-voiced Jingoes who led him thither and fired his eager fancy with visions of an over-sea colony. The Spaniard civilised, christianised, and educated the Filipinos. Long before his dominion ended there were very few illiterates in the islands. He could not hold them. But neither can Uncle Sam. The Spaniard was a political failure in the islands. Uncle Sam is a worse failure. That is about the difference. Were he to pack up his trunk and go home, things might be better in the Philippines. They could not well be worse.

WE are treated from time to time by press and pulpit to much flowery declamation on the commercial greatness and general prosperity of this model of all the centuries. But there are facts in connection with it that should serve to administer a wholesome cold douche to the exuberance of the pulpiteer's and the pressman's verbosity. A noted British judge declared some years ago that the commercial life of our day is rotten through and through. He probably formed his judgment from

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