

NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

JUNE, 1921

THE DEFENSE OF THE PHILIPPINES

BY REAR ADMIRAL BRADLEY A. FISKE, U. S. N. (Retired)

EVER since the battle of Manila Bay that took place on May 1, 1898, the people of the United States have been in considerable doubt as to what they should do with the Philippine Islands. Many have insisted from the first that they should be given to the Filipinos, outright; others have insisted that the Filipinos should be allowed to govern them, under the protection of the United States. There have been many shades of opinion in the matter; but what has happened is that the United States has actually governed them, but permitted the Filipinos to occupy certain governmental positions, and to have a considerable influence in the conduct of affairs.

The result has been that the Philippine Islands have prospered more than ever before, and that their commercial value to the United States has impressed an increasing number of people. Their most obvious value lies in the natural riches of the soil and the consequent opportunities for selling to the Islands the agricultural, commercial and other appliances needed for developing those riches, and for importing the products raised. But a greater, though less obvious, value lies in the nearness of Manila to the vast undeveloped territories of Eastern Asia, and the fact that the many fine bays and harbors of the Philippines could be made to supplement the very few good harbors on the eastern coast of Asia, and give to the United States a base of commercial operations, unequalled by that of any other country, save Japan itself.

Copyright, 1921, by North American Review Corporation. All rights reserved.

But—the Philippines could be taken by anyone who might desire to take them! This casts doubt on the security of our possession of them, and would make any attempt by Americans to develop them of more than questionable wisdom. Furthermore, the great distance of the Islands from America has made the problem of defending them by the ordinary methods an undertaking virtually prohibitive, because of the cost in money, time and effort.

So, the commercially and strategically valuable Philippine Islands still lie spread out on the counter, for anyone to take who will. It is a dangerous and foolish thing thus to leave any property wholly unprotected; and the most dangerous thing possible is to leave property unprotected from a sudden assault by any nation with which causes for friction exist. In such conditions (history tells us) some unlooked for contingency may at any time precipitate a state of popular excitement taking the form of overt action, if a chance for such overt action were in sight. Now, in case some suddenly arising situation should cause a popular outburst against us in Japan, the chance to seize the Philippines might prove too strong a temptation to be resisted.

The last Congress refused to give the navy the very moderate amount it asked for, in order to take advantage of the possibilities of aeronautics. If Congress persists, we may find ourselves with a navy that is very expensive, but so old-fashioned as to be ineffective. Some people think that the more ineffective a navy is, the less danger there is of war. Their attention is respectfully invited to the historical fact that aggression has usually, if not always, been caused by the temptation presented by a valuable property left unprotected from attack.

I need not say that I do not suggest using only airplanes to defend the Philippines; all the usual weapons would, of course, be needed, especially submarines. I do wish, however, to call attention to our amazing backwardness in utilizing airplanes, and to point out the special attributes that make them valuable as preventers of actual invasion.

These attributes are:

1. Great speed, and consequent ability to concentrate in large

numbers against parts of more slowly-moving bodies, such as ships, boats and troops.

2. Ability to rise high and discern objects at great distances.

3. Ability to carry high explosives in convenient forms that have merely to be dropped.

By reason of these three attributes, a force of say one hundred first-class airplanes, properly equipped and manned, if distributed at different points in Luzon (the northernmost island), would be able to concentrate at any threatened point on the coast before the invading troops could start from the transports to the shore.

The only defense against our airplanes would be a greater air force possessed by the enemy. But it must be clear that *no country in the world could compete with us in building airplanes.* The cost to us of a force of airplanes able to protect the Islands would probably be less than one per cent of the cost of any endeavor to recapture them.

One of the possible objections to be urged against defending the Islands may be the supposed fact that the Filipinos have been led to believe that they would be given the Islands as soon as they should prove their capacity for self-government.

Passing over a number of questions, such as who could have the authority to give the Filipinos any cause to believe this, it may be pointed out that, even if the Filipinos should prove their capacity to govern themselves, they cannot possibly prove their capacity to protect themselves against any strong nation desiring to possess them; and that no islands of their great area and richness in all kinds of natural resources, can safely be left unprotected in these days of annexation and colonization.

Again, if the Islands were given to the Filipinos, would they retain them long? Is there any other equally large and valuable tract of land in the possession of any people, so helpless against attack as the Philippine Islands would be if our protection should be withdrawn?

Four courses of action seem to be open to us:—

1. Defend the Islands: a thing easily done, using airplanes, submarines, mines, etc.

2. Leave them defenseless as they practically are now, with the

virtual certainty that they will be taken by an enemy some day, and we forced to send the most expensive expedition ever known to retake them. If we should succeed, the Islands would continue to belong to us.

3. Give them to the Filipinos with no guarantee of protection from us. In this case, the Islands will surely be taken not long afterward by some country.

4. Give them to the Filipinos with the guarantee of our protection. In this case, the difficulties and cost of the expedition to retake them after capture will be identical with those in case 2; but the Islands, instead of belonging to us after the crushing expense and loss of life of the expedition, will (in case of success) belong not to us but to the Filipinos.

But there is a powerful reason for defending the Islands that is apart from any question of having to retake them: that then we shall be as strong in the West Pacific as any other nation. We shall be just as able to protect our merchants and our shipping, and just as well placed for trading direct with China. We shall be even better placed in some ways: for while the Philippines have as good harbors as Japan, they are nearer to the ports of Europe by way of the Mediterranean. In fact, they are directly between the Mediterranean and Japan.

It is unnecessary to consider the suggestion, sometimes made, that to attempt to defend our coast and our over-seas possessions adequately, would constitute a threat to other nations; because its foolishness is proved by the facts of history and the principles of International Law.

BRADLEY A. FISKE.

THE IMPERIAL CONFERENCE

BY PHILIP W. WILSON

DURING the month of June, there will gather in London what used to be called "the Colonial" but is now the Imperial Conference of statesmen representing all the self-governing nations within the British sovereignty, and also India. It is not too much to say that the proceedings will determine whether and in what form there is to be for the future a British Empire or as General Smuts would prefer to define it, an alliance of British commonwealths. In waging the Great War, Germany confidently anticipated that this strange and varied association of peoples, African, Asian, European, civilized and barbaric, Hindu and Moslem, Catholic and Protestant, would fall asunder in the shock of defeat, and even in the shock of victory, the political fabric is strained and would be rent if it did not yield to the stress. With Labor threatening the very existence of society in Britain herself and with Ireland in turmoil, Canada is asserting her nationhood as never before, South Africa has fought an election on secession, Australia demands her own foreign policy, India is evolving Home Rule, and Egypt is swept by an Islamic nationalism. In all this, a German would discover plain symptoms of disruption, yet disruption does not take place. The Conference meets to adjust anomalies and distribute authority, not to disband its constituent countries.

When King George reopened the Parliament after the War, with the old gilt coach and the mediaeval ceremonies of a former day, the press of the United States took especial note, because it meant that, with thrones toppling and a Czar butchered, the old show which dates from King Alfred, was going on apparently as if nothing had happened. In describing the France of Louis the XVI, Carlyle has remarked upon the curious persistence of mere form, on which, at Westminster, a Labor member, on first seeing it, said "This will take a lot of abolishing." It will be in this