

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE ISLAND POSSESSIONS

**Address at The Coliseum in Hartford, Connecticut
August 22, 1902**

I want to speak to you to-night, not on our internal problems as a nation, but on some of the external problems which we have had to face during the last four years. The internal problems are the most important. Keeping our own household straight is our first duty; but we have other duties. Just exactly as each man who is worth his salt must first of all be a good husband, a good father, a good bread-winner, a good man of business, and yet must in addition to that be a good citizen for the State at large--so a nation must first take care to do well its duties within its own borders, but must not make of that fact an excuse for failing to do those of its duties the performance of which lies without its own borders.

The events of the last few years have forced the American Republic to take a larger position in the world than ever before, and therefore more than ever to concern itself with questions of policy coming without its own borders. As a people we have new duties and new opportunities both in the tropical seas and islands south of us and in the farthest Orient. Much depends upon the way in which we meet those duties, the way in which we take advantage of those opportunities. And remember this, you never can meet any duty, and after you have met it say that your action only affected that duty. If you meet it well you face the next duty a stronger man, and if you meet it ill you face your next duty a weaker man.

From the days of Monroe, Clay, and the younger Adams, we as a people have always looked with peculiar interest upon the West Indies and the Isthmus connecting North and South America, feeling that whatever happened there was of particular moment to this nation; and there is better reason for that feeling now than ever before. The outcome of the Spanish War put us in possession of Porto Rico, and brought us into peculiarly close touch with Cuba; while the successful negotiation of the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, and the legislation following it, at last cleared the way for the construction of the Isthmian Canal. Porto Rico, it is a pleasure to say, may, now serve as an example of the best methods of administering our insular possessions. Sometimes we have to learn by experience what to avoid. It is much pleasanter when one can turn to an experience for the purpose of learning what to follow, and the last is true of our experience in Porto Rico. So excellent has been the administration of the island, so excellent the effect of the legislation concerning it, that their very excellence has caused most of us to forget all about it. There is no opportunity for head-lines about Porto Rico. You don't need to use large letters in order to say that Porto Rico continues quiet and prosperous.

There is hardly a ripple of failure upon the stream of our success there; and as we don't have to think of remedies, we follow our usual custom in these matters, and don't think of it at all.

How have we brought that about? First and foremost, in Porto Rico we have consistently striven to get the very best men to administer the affairs of the island. It is desirable throughout our public service to secure a high standard of efficiency and integrity. But after all, here at home we ourselves always have in our own hands the remedy whereby to supply any deficiency in integrity or capacity among those that govern us. That is a fact that seems to have been forgotten, but it is a fact. In a far-off island things are different. There wrong-doing is more easy and those that suffer from it are more helpless; while there is less efficiency check in the way of that public opinion to which public men are sensitive. In consequence, the administration of those islands is beyond all other kinds of administration under our government the one in which the highest standards must be demanded. In making appointments to the insular service, the appointing power must feel all the time that he is acting for the country as a whole, in the interest of the good name of our people as a whole, and any question of mere party expediency must be wholly swept aside, and the matter looked at solely from the standpoint of the honor of our own nation and the welfare of the islands. We have gotten along so well in Porto Rico because we have acted up to that theory in choosing our men down there--governor, treasurer, attorney-general, judges, superintendent of education--every one. You will find among those men all the shades of different political opinion that we have here at home; but you will find them knit together by the purpose of administering the affairs of that island on the highest plane of decency and efficiency.

Besides acting in good faith, we have acted with good sense, and that is also important. We have not been frightened or misled into giving to the people of the island a form of government unsuitable to them. While providing that the people should govern themselves as far as possible, we have not hesitated in their own interests to keep the power of shaping their destiny.

In Cuba the problem was larger, more complicated, more difficult. Here again we kept our promise absolutely. After having delivered the island from its oppressors, we refused to turn it loose offhand, with the certainty that it would sink back into chaos and savagery. For over three years we administered it on a plane higher than it had ever reached before during the four hundred years that had elapsed since the Spaniards first landed upon its shores. We brought moral and physical cleanliness into the government. We cleaned the cities for the first time in their existence. We stamped out yellow fever--an inestimable boon not merely to Cuba, but to the people of the Southern States as well. We established a school system. We made life and property secure, so that industry could again begin to thrive. Then when we had laid deep and broad the foundations upon which civil liberty and national independence must rest, we turned the island over to the hands of those whom its people had chosen as the founders of the new republic. It is a republic with which our own great Republic must ever be closely knit by the ties of common interests and common inspirations. Cuba must always be peculiarly related to us in international politics. She must in international affairs be to a degree a part of our political system. In return she must have peculiar relations with us economically.

She must be in a sense part of our economic system. We expect her to accept a political attitude toward us which we think wisest both for her and for us. In return we must be prepared to put her in an economic position as regards our tariff system which will give her some measure of the prosperity which we enjoy. We cannot, in my judgment, avoid taking this attitude if we are to persevere in the course which we have outlined for ourselves as a nation during the past four years; and therefore I believe that it is only a matter of time--and I trust only a matter of a very short time--before we enter into reciprocal trade relations with Cuba.

The Isthmian Canal is to be one of the greatest, probably the greatest, engineering feats of the twentieth century; and I am glad it is to be done by America. We must take care that it is done under the best conditions and by the best Americans. There are certain preliminary matters to settle. When this has been done, the first question will come upon choosing the commission which is to supervise the building of the Canal. And but one thought here is permissible--how to get the very best men of the highest engineering and business and administrative skill, who will consent to undertake the work. If possible, I wish to see those men represent different sections and different political parties. But those questions are secondary. The primary aim must be to get men who, though able to control much greater salaries than the nation is able to pay, nevertheless possess the patriotism and the healthy ambition which will make them put their talents at the government's service.

So much for what has been done in the Occident. In the Orient the labor was more difficult.

It is rare indeed that a great work, a work supremely worth doing, can be done save at the cost not only of labor and toil, but of much puzzling worry during the time of the performance. Normally, the nation that achieves greatness, like the individual who achieves greatness, can do so only at the cost of anxiety and bewilderment and heart-wearing effort. Timid people, people scant of faith and hope, and good people who are not accustomed to the roughness of the life of effort are almost sure to be disheartened and dismayed by the work and the worry, and overmuch cast down by the shortcomings, actual or seeming, which in real life always accompany the first stages even of what eventually turn out to be the most brilliant victories.

All this is true of what has happened during the last four years in the Philippine Islands. The Spanish War itself was an easy task, but it left us certain other tasks which were much more difficult. One of these tasks was that of dealing with the Philippines. The easy thing to do--the thing which appealed not only to lazy and selfish men, but to very many good men whose thought did not drive down to the root of things--was to leave the islands. Had we done this, a period of wild chaos would have supervened, and then some stronger power would have stepped in and seized the islands and have taken up the task which we in such a case would have flinched from performing. A less easy, but infinitely more absurd course, would have been to leave the islands ourselves, and at the same time to assert that we would not permit any one else to interfere with them. This particular course would have combined all the possible disadvantages of every other course which was advocated.

It would have placed us in a humiliating position, because when the actual test came it would have been quite out of the question for us, after some striking deed of savagery had occurred in the islands, to stand by and prevent the re-entry of civilization into them, while the mere fact of our having threatened thus to guarantee the local tyrants and wrong-doers against outside interference by ourselves or others, would have put a premium upon every species of tyranny and anarchy within the islands.

Finally, there was the course which we adopted--not an easy course, and one fraught with danger and difficulty, as is generally the case in this world when some great feat is to be accomplished as an incident to working out national destiny. We made up our minds to stay in the islands--to put down violence--to establish peace and order--and then to introduce a just and wise civil rule accompanied by a measure of self-government which should increase as rapidly as the islanders showed themselves fit for it. It was certainly a formidable task; but think of the marvelously successful way in which it has been accomplished! The first and vitally important it was the establishment of the supremacy of the American flag and this had to be done by the effort of these gallant fellow Americans of ours to whom so great a debt is due--the officers and enlisted men of the United States regular and volunteer forces. In a succession of campaigns, carried on in unknown tropic jungles against an elusive and treacherous foe vastly outnumbering them, under the most adverse conditions of climate, weather, and country, our troops completely broke the power of the insurgents, smashed their armies, and harried the broken robber bands into submission. In its last stages, the war against our rule sank into mere brigandage; and what our troops had to do was to hunt down the parties of ladrones.

It was not an easy task which it was humanly possible to accomplish in a month or a year; and therefore after the first month and the first year had elapsed, some excellent people said that it couldn't be done; but it was done. Month by month, year by year, with unwearied and patient resolution, our army in the Philippines did the task which it found ready at hand until the last vestige of organized insurrection was stamped out. I do not refer to the Moros, with whom we have exercised the utmost forbearance, but who may force us to chastise them if they persist in attacking our troops. We will do everything possible to avoid having trouble with them, but if they insist upon it it will come. Among the Filipinos proper, however, peace has come. Doubtless here and there sporadic outbreaks of brigandage will occur from time to time, but organized warfare against the American flag has ceased, and there is no reason to apprehend its recurrence. Our army in the islands has been reduced until it is not a fourth of what it was at the time the outbreak was at its height.

Step by step as the army conquered, the rule of the military was supplanted by the rule of the civil authorities--the soldier was succeeded by the civilian magistrate. The utmost care has been exercised in choosing the best type of Americans for the high civil positions, and the actual work of administration has been done, so far as possible, by native Filipino officials serving under these Americans. The success of the effort has been wonderful. Never has this country had a more upright or an abler body of public representatives than Governor Taft, Vice-Governor Wright, and their associates and subordinates in the Philippine Islands.

It is a very difficult matter, practically, to apply the principles of an orderly free government to an Oriental people struggling upward out of barbarism and subjection. It is a task requiring infinite firmness, patience, tact, broadmindedness. All these qualities, and the countless others necessary, have been found in the civil and military officials who have been sent over to administer the islands. It was, of course, inevitable that there should be occasional failures; but it is astonishing how few these have been. Here and there the civil government which had been established in a given district had to be temporarily withdrawn because of some outbreak. Let me give you an idea of some of the difficulties. We have been trying to put into effect the principle of a popular choice of representatives. In one district it proved to be wholly impossible to make the people understand how to vote. Finally they took a little hill, and put two candidates, one on one side and one on the other, and made the people walk up and stand by the candidate they wanted.

But at last, on the July 4th that has just passed--o the one hundred and twenty-sixth anniversary of our independence--it was possible at the same time to declare amnesty throughout the islands and definitely to establish civil rule over all of them, excepting the country of the Mohammedan Moros, where the conditions were wholly different. Each inhabitant of the Philippines is now guaranteed his civil and religious rights, his rights to life, personal liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, subject only to not infringing the rights of others. It is worth noting that during these three or four years under us the Philippine people have attained to a greater degree of self government, that they now have more to say as to how they shall be governed, than is the case with any people in the Orient which is under European rule. Nor is this all. Congress has, with far-seeing wisdom, heartily supported all that has been done by the Executive.

Wise laws for the government of the Philippine Islands have been placed upon the statute-books, and under those laws provision is made for the introduction into the Philippines of representative government, with only the delay absolutely necessary to allow for the establishment of definite peace, for the taking of a census, and the settling down of the country. In short, we are governing the Filipinos primarily in their interest, and for their very great benefit. And we have acted in practical fashion--not trying to lay down rules as to what should be done in the remote and uncertain future, but turning our attention to the instant need of things and meeting that need in the fullest and amplest way. It would be hard to say whether we owe most to our military or our civil representatives in the Philippines. The soldiers have shown splendid gallantry in the field; and they have done no less admirable work in preparing the provinces for civil government. The civil authorities have shown the utmost wisdom in doing a very difficult and important work of vast extent. It would be hard to find in modern times a better example of successful constructive statesmanship than the American representatives have given to the Philippine Islands.

In the Philippines, as in Cuba, the instances of wrongdoing among either our civil or military representatives have been astonishingly few; and punishment has been meted with evenhanded justice to all offenders.

Nor should it be forgotten that while we have thus acted in the interest of the islanders themselves, we have also helped our own people. Our interests are as great in the Pacific as in the Atlantic. The welfare of California, Oregon, and Washington is as vital to the nation as the welfare of New England, New York, and the South-Atlantic States. The awakening of the Orient means very much to all the nations of Christendom, commercially no less than politically; and it would be short-sighted statesmanship on our part to refuse to take the necessary steps for securing a proper share to our people of this commercial future. The possession of the Philippines has helped us, as the securing of the open door in China has helped us. Already the government has taken the necessary steps to provide for the laying of a Pacific cable under conditions which safeguard absolutely the interests of the American public. Our commerce with the East is growing rapidly. Events have abundantly justified, alike from the moral and material standpoint, all that we have done in the Far East as a sequel to our war with Spain.