

PRESIDENT MCKINLEY'S MESSAGE TO CONGRESS

To the Senate and House of Representatives:

Notwithstanding the added burdens rendered necessary by the war, our people rejoice in a very satisfactory and steadily increasing degree of prosperity, evidenced by the largest volume of business ever recorded. Every manufacture has been productive, agriculture pursuits have yielded abundant returns, labor in the fields of industry is better rewarded, revenue legislation passed by the present Congress has increased the treasury's receipts to the amount estimated by its authorities, the finances of the government have been successfully administered and its credit advanced to the first rank, while its currency has been maintained at the world's highest standard. Military service under a common flag and for a righteous cause has strengthened the national spirit and served to cement more closely than ever the fraternal bonds between every section of the country. A review of the relation of the United States to other powers, always appropriate in this year of primary importance in view of the momentous issues which have arisen, demanding in one instance the ultimate determination by arms, and involving far-reaching consequences which will require the earnest attention of the Congress.

DUTY TOWARD SPAIN.

In my last annual message, very full consideration was given to the question of the duty of the government of the United States toward Spain, and the Cuban insurrection, as being by far the most important problem with which we were called upon to deal. The considerations then advanced, and the exposition of the views therein expressed, disclosed my sense of the extreme gravity of the situation. Setting aside, as logically unfounded, or practically inadmissible, the recognition of the Cuban insurgents as belligerents, the recognition of the independence of Cuba, neutral intervention to end the war by imposing a rational compromise between the contestants, intervention in favor of one or the other party and the forcible annexation of the island, I concluded it was honestly due to our friendly relations with Spain that she should be given a reasonable chance to realize her expectations of reform to which she had become irrevocably committed. Within a few weeks previous she had announced comprehensive plans, which it was confidently asserted would be efficacious to remedy the evils so deeply affecting our own country, so injurious to the true interests of the mother country, as well as those of Cuba and so repugnant to the universal sentiment of humanity.

The ensuing months brought little sign of real progress toward the pacification of Cuba. The Autonomous administration set up in the capital and some of the principal cities appeared not to gain the favor of the inhabitants nor to be able to extend their influence to the large extent of territory held by the insurgents, while the military arm, obviously unable to cope with the still active rebellion, continued many of the most objectionable and offensive policies of the government that had preceded it. No tangible relief was afforded the vast numbers of unhappy reconcentrados, despite the reiterated professions made in that regard, and the amount appropriated by Spain to that end. The proffered expedient of zones of cultivation proved illusory; indeed, no less practical nor more delusive promises of succor could well have been tendered to the exhausted and destitute people, stripped of all that made life and home dear, and herded in a strange region

among unsympathetic strangers hardly less necessitous than themselves.

STARVING RECONCENTRADOS.

By the end of December the mortality among them had frightfully increased. Conservative estimates from Spanish sources placed the deaths among these distressed people at over 40 per cent, from the time Gen. Weyler's decree of reconcentrados was enforced. With the acquiescence of Spanish authorities, a scheme was adopted for relief by charitable contributions, raised in this country and distributed under the direction of the consul general and the several consuls, by noble and earnest individual effort through the organized agencies of the American Red Cross.

Thousands of lives were thus saved but many thousands more were inaccessible to such form of aid.

The war continued on the old footing without comprehensive plan, developing only the same spasmodic encounters, barren of strategic result, that had marked the course of the earlier ten years of rebellion as well as the present insurrection from its start. No alternative save physical exhaustion of either combatant and therewithal the practical ruin of the island, lay in sight, but how far distant no one could venture to conjecture.

DESTRUCTION OF THE MAINE.

At this juncture, on the 15th of February last, occurred the destruction of the battleship Maine, while rightfully lying in the harbor of Havana on a mission of international courtesy and good-will, a catastrophe the suspicious nature and horror of which stirred the nation's heart profoundly. It is a striking evidence of the poise and sturdy good sense distinguishing our national character that this shocking blow, falling upon a generous people, already deeply touched by preceding events in Cuba, did not move them to desperate resolve to tolerate no longer the existence of a condition of danger and disorder at our doors that made possible such a deed by whomsoever wrought. Yet, the instinct of justice prevailed and the nation anxiously awaited the result of the searching investigation at once set on foot. The finding of the naval board of inquiry established that the origin of the explosion was external by a submarine mine and only halted through lack of positive testimony to fix the responsibility of its authorship.

All those things carried conviction to the most thoughtful, even before the finding of the naval court, that a crisis in our relations with Spain and toward Cuba were at hand. So strong was this belief that it needed but a brief executive suggestion to the Congress to receive immediate answer to the duty of making instant provision for the possible and perhaps speedily probable emergency of war, and the remarkable, almost unique spectacle was presented of a unanimous vote of both houses on the 9th of March, appropriating fifty million dollars, for the national defense and for each and every purpose connected therewith, to be expended at the discretion of the President.

NOT READY FOR WAR.

That this act of provision came none too soon was disclosed when the application of the fund was undertaken. Our forts were practically undefended. Our navy needed large provision for increased ammunition and supplies and even numbers, to cope with any sudden attack from the navy of Spain, which comprised modern vessels of the highest type of continental perfection. Our army also required enlargement of men and munitions. The details of the hurried preparation for the decided contingency is told in the reports of the

secretaries of war and of the navy and need not be repeated here. It is sufficient to say that the outbreak of war, when it did come, found our nation not unprepared to meet the conflict.

Nor was the apprehension of coming strife confined to our own country. It was felt by the contingent powers, which on April 6th, through their ambassadors and envoys, addressed to the executive an expression of hope that humanity and moderation might mark the course of this government and people and that further negotiations would lead to an attempt which, while securing the maintenance of peace, would affirm all necessary guarantees for the re-establishment of order in Cuba. In responding to that presentation I also shared the hope that the envoys had expressed that peace might be preserved in a manner to terminate the chronic condition of disturbance in Cuba, so injurious and menacing to our interests and tranquility, as well as shocking to our sentiments of humanity; and while appreciating the humanitarian and disinterested character of the communication they had adopted on behalf of the powers, it had stated the confidence of this government on its part that equal appreciation would be shown for its earnest and unselfish endeavors to fulfill a duty of humanity by ending a situation, the indefinite prolongation of which had become insufferable.

RECOGNITION OF CUBA.

Still animated by the hope of a peaceful solution and obeying the dictates of duty, no effort was relaxed to bring about a speedy ending of the Cuban struggle. Negotiations to this effect continued actively with the government of Spain looking to the immediate conclusion of a six months' armistice in Cuba with a view to effect the recognition of her people's right to independence. Besides this, the instant revocation of the order of reconcentration was asked, so that the sufferers, returning to their homes and aided by united American and Spanish effort, might be put in a way to support themselves and by orderly resumption of the well-nigh destroyed productive energies of the island, contribute to the restoration of its tranquility and well-being. Negotiations continued for some little time at Madrid, resulting in offers by the Spanish government which could not but be regarded as inadequate. It was proposed to confide the preparation of peace to the insular parliament, yet to be convened under the autonomous decrees of November, 1897, but without impairment in any wise of the constitutional powers of the Madrid government, which to that end would grant an armistice, if solicited by the insurgents, for such time as the general in chief might see fit to fix. How and with what scope of discretionary powers, the insular parliament was expected to set about the "preparation" of peace, did not appear. If it was to be by negotiation with the insurgents the issue seemed to rest on the side with a body chosen by that faction of the electors in the districts under Spanish control, and on the other with the insurgent population holding the interior country, unrepresented in the so-called parliament, and defiant at the suggestion of suing for peace.

SPAIN'S CALLOUSNESS.

Grieved and disappointed at this barren outcome of my sincere endeavors to reach a practicable solution I felt it my duty to remit the whole question to the Congress. In the message of April 11, 1898, I announced that with this last overture in the direction of immediate peace in Cuba and its disappointing reception by Spain, the effort of the executive was brought to an end. I again reviewed the alterna-