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Speech of  
Hon. William C. Arnold



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FREE CUBA.

“Charters of Liberty are always Written in the Blood of  
Heroes.”

SPEECH

OF

HON. WILLIAM C. ARNOLD,

OF PENNSYLVANIA,

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

Thursday, March 24, 1898.

The House being in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union, and having under consideration the bill (H. R. 9378) making appropriations for the naval service for the fiscal year 1898-'99—

Mr. ARNOLD said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: We stand to-day on the verge of an armed conflict, and it were well that our actions be justified by the facts and approved by honorable men everywhere. It is clear that the *Maine* was in a supposedly friendly harbor, and was anchored in a particular spot by direction of the Spanish authorities. Our naval court of inquiry, composed of men of unsullied honor and sterling integrity, it is believed, found that the vessel was blown up by some external force—a mine or torpedo.

As to what particular persons were the active agents we may not be informed directly, but we do know that the only party interested, and the only party which hates the United States and which was in a position to accomplish the cowardly and infamous act, was Spain. It may not have been officially directed, but the responsibility still exists. Without such direction there is such negligence as would make the party, in criminal law, guilty of manslaughter in a similar occurrence as between citizens of a State. To my mind there is moral and legal responsibility resting upon Spain. Assuming all this to be true—and I believe it to be true—what should be our demands in way of reparation? In this connection, I desire to refer to the suggestion of some un-American citizens, that the controversy be settled by arbitration.

I submit, Mr. Chairman, this can not be done with honor. We have not only lost the *Maine*, which in money can be estimated, but there were ushered into eternity without a moment's warning 266 American sailors, whose lives were dear to them and dear to us, and this can not be estimated or measured. Shall we make merchandise of the lives of our people? Can money purchase human life? Is gold dearer to us than the blood of patriots? No,

no! And there can not be and must not be any arbitration. [Applause.] Our honor is at stake and our flag insulted. If I insult any gentleman in this House, should there be arbitration to decide and inform that gentleman whether or not he has been insulted? Again, any agreement to arbitrate is an infamous reflection on the honor and integrity of the gentlemen who composed our court of inquiry.

You may then say that my views would necessarily lead to war. In connection with other facts which I will refer to, relative to Cuba, I unhesitatingly say, yes, war, with all that it implies, unless full damages be immediately paid and the complete independence of Cuba be at once obtained. War is the incarnation of an awful tragedy, but a greater tragedy was enacted when 266 brave American sailors went down to their death through the infamy and treachery of Spain or of some of her subjects. We all love peace, and it is dear to us, but may it never again be said of this great nation that we will purchase peace at the price of honor. [Applause.]

As to our recognition of belligerent rights or the independence of Cuba, I confidently assert we have both a moral and legal right so to do. International law materially differs from constitutional or statute law. First, it is not universal, and is not binding in law or conscience upon any except those nations which have so agreed. In fact, so-called international law is not law in its true sense, but is in the nature of a contract or compact or agreement by common consent. These principles, or rather agreements, are very broad and general in character, and no positive or inflexible rule of action is prescribed.

The result or effect is that each particular case must be determined by the circumstances, surroundings, and facts of that case. But as to our interference in Cuba we have authority and precedents. Grotius says:

The same justice which binds the individual as an individual must bind him as a state member. The law of nature which penetrates the individual conscience must guide the national conduct. Justice is approved of and injustice condemned by the consent of all good men in every relation of life.

D'Anbigne says:

There is a God in history. There is a moral power abroad whose dictates neither statesman nor nation can afford to despise.

Maine on International Law says:

This (Roman) *ius gentium* is identical with natural law, and this is, in truth, the highest law by which individuals and nations can be governed; highest in the absolute perfection of the rules which it contains; highest in the cogency of the commands which it utters, and highest in the absolute obligation of the duties which it enforces.

Let us now refer to precedents: In 1849 the United States early and promptly—being the first so to do—recognized the independence of far-off Hungary. In 1825 England recognized the independence of the revolted South American colonies of Spain, “because of sympathies, united with English commercial interests.” The United States had several years earlier—in 1822—recognized the independence of these same South American republics. In 1802 England instructed its representative in Paris as follows:

You will state most distinctly His Majesty's determination never to forego his right of interfering in the affairs of the Continent on every occasion in which the interests of his own dominions may appear to him to require it. This right His Majesty possesses in common with every other independent power. It rests upon general principles.

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It was in this same spirit and on the same principle that the British ministry defended the bombardment of Copenhagen and the seizure of the neutral Danish fleet.

Another precedent, interesting and pertinent at this time, was the prompt recognition by Spain, in June, 1861, of the independence of the Confederate States in our own land. But it is unnecessary to multiply authority and precedents. The millions spent by our country in preventing filibustering expeditions to Cuba, the loss of tens of millions in commerce, the illegal and revolting imprisonment by Spain of American residents in Cuba, these and many other good reasons demand immediate action, which has been too long, much too long, delayed. The question will never be settled until it is settled right.

But throwing aside all precedents and all injuries, and not even considering the *Maine* disaster, there is a law greater and higher and nobler than any and all international law, the law of common humanity, which not only justifies but demands immediate action at our hands. More than 400,000 innocent and peaceful men, women, and children deliberately starved to death within the last two years, and hundreds, if not thousands, now dying by starvation daily, almost within sight of our shores.

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Intensely and sadly interesting as is Senator PROCTOR'S and Senator GALLINGER'S portrayal of the sad scene, and though we have had full knowledge of the awful crime, no hand has been lifted to save. I have confidence in our present Chief Magistrate. I hope and believe he will measure up not only to his full duty but his opportunities. Washington, because of his labors in the cause of liberty, will live through all time. Lincoln, in the courage, gentleness, and firmness of his great heart, through the emancipation proclamation, will be honored through all the countless ages yet to come.

And to our present Chief Magistrate there has come an opportunity seldom vouchsafed to man to build for himself, in the cause of humanity and freedom, a monument which all the assaults of all time can not destroy, and leave to posterity a glorious name, which will be revered by all men and which will be an inspiration to all in future ages who shall battle for their liberties. [Applause.]

The blood of these murdered people is on the hands of our nation to-day. The whole question has resolved itself into one of annihilation or independence. It has been well demonstrated that Spain can not conquer; so she has been pursuing the policy of annihilation by starvation. Simple and common humanity should now move us to duty too long delayed. Let us do right, though war result, as it probably will. The history of the world, from the slavery of the Israelites under Pharaoh down to this hour, shows that charters of liberty are always written in the blood of heroes.

There can be no peace for Cuba, and we as a nation will ever be annoyed and troubled, until absolute independence is an accomplished fact. Independence is no new thing to the world at large or to ourselves as a nation. Autonomy for Cuba by Spain is a delusion, a snare, and a failure. Many centuries ago autonomy was a fascinating word to Hellenic ears, but it only paved the way to Hellenic subjection, and Greece perished.

In this emergency Providence points the way, duty bids us move on in the pathway of progressive civilization, humanity demands that we march resolutely forward, and justice insists that we punish



deceit, perfidy, treachery, cruelty, tyranny, and savagery, which are the predominant traits of Spanish character. I put this statement against that made by General Blanco in Habana a few days ago:

The present generation will never see another banner than that of Spain at the entrance to the Gulf of Mexico. That banner, representing civilization, progress, liberty, humanity, and religion, will be eternal.

How matchless the irony; how infamous the falsehood!

In the splendid progress and civilization of the last four centuries by the great nations of the world, Spain has not taken one single step forward, and she to-day belongs to the age of barbarism. She deserves no place and should not have a place on the map of the world. Compared with her treatment of Cubans, the Turkish massacres of the Armenians were humane.

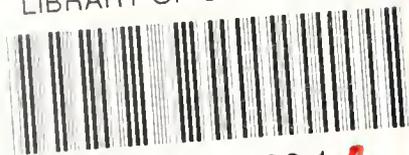
It has been said that our intervention may cause foreign complications. This should not deter us from our plain duty; but there is no such danger; any foreign interference would be met by the two great English-speaking people of the world. I would not favor "entangling alliances," but I would not refuse the active kindness of platonic, if not maternal, friendship. In this connection I am reminded of the statement of a prominent Spaniard, a few days ago, that if we became involved with Spain, there was great danger of a revolt against our Government by the late Confederate States. What gross ignorance; what an infamous slander. 'Tis true the South suffered much at the hands of the North during our late strife. Very many of her best and bravest went down to their death; beautiful homes were ruined and desolate; sorrow and despair seemed their only heritage. But, withal, honor, courage, and determination were still theirs, and with these as part and parcel of ideal manhood, a new South has sprung up, and joining hands with their brethren of the North we are all moving onward and upward to attain to the highest possibilities of this our nation—one God, one flag, one country, one destiny.

And if that flag is ever assailed I know that no hand will be quicker than that of the South to strike down the assailant, and none will more earnestly and quickly respond to defend the honor and glory of this United States.

I will not detain the House longer, except to urge the duty of the hour. That duty is independence and intervention. In the name of the Christ, let us be humane; in the name of humanity, let us be just; in the name of justice, let us do right; and being right let us dare maintain it. [Loud applause.]



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