


SENATOR THURSTON

 **JOHN MELLE** THURSTON, American politician and publicist, was born at Montpelier, Vt., Aug. 21, 1847, and removed with his parents to Madison, Wis., in 1854. His education was obtained at the public schools and at Wayland College, Wis., while he supported himself by farm work and other manual labor. After studying law he was admitted to the Bar in 1869, and in the same year took up his residence at Omaha, Neb. In 1872, he was elected to the Omaha city council, and in 1874 became city attorney. He was a member of the Nebraska legislature in 1875, and president of the Republican League of the United States, 1888-91. In 1877, he was appointed assistant attorney of the Union Pacific Railway Company, and in 1888 became general solicitor of the entire Union Pacific system, a position which he retained until 1895, when he was elected to the United States Senate.

CUBA MUST BE FREE

DELIVERED IN THE UNITED STATES SENATE, MARCH 24, 1898

MR. PRESIDENT,—I am here by command of silent lips to speak once and for all upon the Cuban situation. I trust that no one has expected anything sensational from me. God forbid that the bitterness of a personal loss should induce me to color in the slightest degree the statement that I feel it my duty to make. I shall endeavor to be honest, conservative, and just. I have no purpose to stir the public passion to any action not necessary and imperative to meet the duties and necessities of American responsibility, Christian humanity, and national honor. I would shirk this task if I could, but I dare not. I cannot satisfy my conscience except by speaking, and speaking now.

Some three weeks since, three Senators and two Representatives in Congress accepted the invitation of a great metropolitan newspaper to make a trip to Cuba and person-

(98)

ally investigate and report upon the situation there. Our invitation was from a newspaper whose political teachings I have never failed to antagonize and denounce, and whose journalism I have considered decidedly sensational. But let me say, for the credit of the proprietor of the paper in question, that I believe the invitation extended to us was inspired by his patriotic desire to have the actual condition of affairs in Cuba brought to the attention of the American people in such a way that the facts would no longer remain in controversy or dispute.

We were not asked to become the representatives of the paper; no conditions or restrictions were imposed upon us; we were left free to conduct the investigation in our own way, make our own plans, pursue our own methods, take our own time, and decide for ourselves upon the best manner of laying the results of our labors before the American people. For myself I went to Cuba firmly believing that the condition of affairs there had been greatly exaggerated by the press, and my own efforts were directed in the first instance to the attempted exposure of these supposed exaggerations.

Mr. President, there has undoubtedly been much sensationalism in the journalism of the time, but as to the condition of affairs in Cuba there has been no exaggeration, because exaggeration has been impossible. I have read the careful statement of the junior senator from Vermont [Mr. Proctor], and I find that he has anticipated me in almost every detail. From my own personal knowledge of the situation, I adopt every word of his concise, conservative, specific presentation as my own; nay, more, I am convinced that he has, in a measure, understated the facts. I absolutely agree with him in the following conclusions:

After three years of warfare and the use of 225,000

Spanish troops, Spain has lost control of every foot of Cuba not surrounded by an actual intrenchment and protected by a fortified picket line.

She holds possession with her armies of the fortified seaboard towns, not because the insurgents could not capture many of them, but because they are under the virtual protection of Spanish warships, with which the revolutionists cannot cope.

The revolutionists are in absolute and almost peaceful possession of nearly one half of the island, including the eastern provinces of Santiago de Cuba and Puerto Principe. In those provinces they have an established form of government, levy and collect taxes, maintain armies, and generally levy a tax or tribute upon the principal plantations in the other provinces, and, as is commonly believed, upon the entire railway system of the island.

In the four so-called Spanish provinces there is neither cultivation nor railway operation except under strong Spanish military protection or by consent of the revolutionists in consideration of tribute paid.

Under the inhuman policy of Weyler not less than 400,000 self-supporting, simple, peaceable, defenceless country people were driven from their homes in the agricultural portions of the Spanish provinces to the cities and imprisoned upon the barren waste outside the residence portions of these cities and within the lines of intrenchment established a little way beyond. Their humble homes were burned, their fields laid waste, their implements of husbandry destroyed, their live stock and food supplies for the most part confiscated. Most of these people were old men, women, and children. They were thus placed in hopeless imprisonment, without shelter or food. There was no work for them in the cities to which

they were driven. They were left there with nothing to depend upon except the scanty charity of the inhabitants of the cities and with slow starvation their inevitable fate.

It is conceded upon the best ascertainable authority, and those who have had access to the public records do not hesitate to state, that upward of 210,000 of these people have already perished, all from starvation or from diseases incident to starvation.

The government of Spain has never contributed one dollar to house, shelter, feed, or provide medical attention for these its own citizens. Such a spectacle exceeds the scenes of the Inferno as painted by Dante.

There has been no amelioration of the situation except through the charity of the people of the United States. There has been no diminution in the death rate among these reconcentrados except as the death supply is constantly diminished. There can be no relief and no hope except through the continued charity of the American people until peace shall be fully restored in the island and until a humane government shall return these people to their homes and provide for them anew the means with which to begin again the cultivation of the soil.

Spain cannot put an end to the existing condition. She cannot conquer the insurgents. She cannot re-establish her sovereignty over any considerable portion of the interior of the island. The revolutionists, while able to maintain themselves, cannot drive the Spanish army from the fortified sea-coast towns.

The situation, then, is not war as we understand it, but a chaos of devastation and depopulation of undefined duration, whose end no man can see.

I will cite but a few facts that came under my personal

observation, all tending to fully substantiate the absolute truth of the foregoing propositions. I could detail incidents by the hour and by the day, but the senator from Vermont has absolutely covered the case. I have no desire to deal in horrors. If I had my way, I would shield the American public even from the photographic reproductions of the awful scenes that I viewed in all their original ghastliness.

Spain has sent to Cuba more than 225,000 soldiers to subdue the island, whose entire male population capable of bearing arms did not exceed at the beginning that number. These soldiers were mostly boys, conscripts from the Spanish hills. They are well armed, but otherwise seem to be absolutely unprovided for. They have been without tents and practically without any of the necessary supplies and equipment for service in the field. They have been put in barracks, in warehouses, and old buildings in the cities where all sanitary surroundings have been of the worst possible character. They have seen but little discipline, and I could not ascertain that such a thing as a drill had taken place in the island.

There are less than 60,000 now available for duty. The balance are dead or sick in hospitals, or have been sent back to Spain as incapacitated for further service. It is currently stated that there are now 37,000 sick in hospital. I do not believe that the entire Spanish army in Cuba could stand an engagement in the open field against 20,000 well-disciplined American soldiers.

As an instance of the discipline among them I cite the fact that I bought the machete of a Spanish soldier on duty at the wharf in Matanzas, on his offer, for \$3 in Spanish silver. He also seemed desirous of selling me his only remaining arm, a revolver.

The Spanish soldiers have not been paid for some months, and in my judgment they, of all the people on the earth, will most gladly welcome any result which would permit them to return to their homes in Spain.

The pictures in the American newspapers of the starving reconcentrados are true. They can all be duplicated by the thousands. I never saw, and please God I may never again see, so deplorable a sight as the reconcentrados in the suburbs of Matanzas. I can never forget to my dying day the hopeless anguish in their despairing eyes. Huddled about their little bark huts, they raised no voice of appeal to us for alms as we went among them.

There was almost no begging by the reconcentrados themselves. The streets of the cities are full of beggars of all ages and all conditions, but they are almost wholly of the residents of the cities and largely of the professional-beggar class. The reconcentrados—men, women, and children—stand silent, famishing with hunger. Their only appeal comes from their sad eyes, through which one looks as through an open window into their agonizing souls.

The present autonomist governor of Matanzas (who speaks excellent English) was inaugurated in November last. His records disclose that at the city of Matanzas there were 1,200 deaths in November, 1,200 in December, 700 in January, and 500 in February—3,600 in four months, and those four months under the administration of a governor whom I believe to be a truly humane man. He stated to me that on the day of his inauguration, which I think was the 12th of last November, to his personal knowledge fifteen persons died in the public square in front of the executive mansion. Think of it, oh, my countrymen! Fifteen human beings dying from starvation in the public square, in the shade of the palm-trees,

and amid the beautiful flowers, in sight of the open windows of the executive mansion!

The governor of Matanzas told us that for the most part the people of the city of Matanzas had done all they could for the reconcentrados; and after studying the situation over I believe his statement is true. He said the condition of affairs in the island had destroyed the trade, the commerce, and the business of the city; that most of the people who had the means assisted the reconcentrados with food just as long as they could, but he said to us that there were thousands of the people living in fine houses on marble floors who were in deep need themselves and who did not know from one day to the other where their food supply was coming from.

The ability of the people of Matanzas to aid is practically exhausted. The governor told us that he had expended all of his salary and all that he could possibly afford of his private means in relief work. He is willing that the reconcentrados shall repress the picket line and go back to seek work in the interior of the island. He expresses his willingness to give them passes for that purpose, but they are no longer physically able to take advantage of that offer. They have no homes to return to; their fields have grown up to weeds; they have no oxen, no implements of husbandry with which to begin anew the cultivation of the soil. Their only hope is to remain where they are, to live as long as they can on an insufficient charity, and then die. What is true at Matanzas is true at all the other cities where these reconcentrados have been gathered.

The government of Spain has not and will not appropriate one dollar to save these people. They are now being attended and nursed and administered to by the charity of the United States. Think of the spectacle! We are feeding these

citizens of Spain; we are nursing their sick; we are saving such as can be saved, and yet there are those who still say it is right for us to send food, but we must keep hands off. I say that the time has come when muskets ought to go with the food.

We asked the governor if he knew of any relief for these people except through the charity of the United States. He did not.

We then asked him, "Can you see any end to this condition of affairs?" He could not.

We asked him, "When do you think the time will come that these people can be placed in a position of self-support?"

He replied to us, with deep feeling, "Only the good God or the great government of the United States can answer that question."

I hope and believe that the good God by the great government of the United States will answer that question.

I shall refer to these horrible things no further. They are there. God pity me; I have seen them; they will remain in my mind forever—and this is almost the twentieth century. Christ died nineteen hundred years ago, and Spain is a Christian nation. She has set up more crosses in more lands, beneath more skies, and under them has butchered more people than all the other nations of the earth combined.

Europe may tolerate her existence as long as the people of the Old World wish. God grant that before another Christmas morning the last vestige of Spanish tyranny and oppression will have vanished from the Western Hemisphere.

Mr. President, the distinguished senator from Vermont has seen all these things; he knows all these things; he has described all these things; but after describing them he says he has nothing to propose, no remedy to suggest. I have. I

am only an humble unit in the great government of the United States, but I should feel myself a traitor did I remain silent now.

I counselled silence and moderation from this floor when the passion of the nation seemed at white heat over the destruction of the "Maine;" but it seems to me the time for action has now come. Not action in the "Maine" case! I hope and trust that this government will take action on the Cuban situation entirely outside of the "Maine" case. When the "Maine" report is received, if it be found that our ship and sailors were blown up by some outside explosive, we will have ample reparation without quibble or delay; and if the explosion can be traced to Spanish official sources there will be such swift and terrible punishment adjudged as will remain a warning to the world forever.

What shall the United States do, Mr. President?

I am a Republican, and I turn to the last platform of my party and I read:

"From the hour of achieving their own independence the people of the United States have regarded with sympathy the struggles of other American people to free themselves from European domination. We watch with deep and abiding interest the heroic battle of the Cuban patriots against cruelty and oppression, and our best hopes go out for the full success of their determined contest for liberty.

"The government of Spain having lost control of Cuba and being unable to protect the property or lives of resident American citizens, or to comply with its treaty obligations, we believe that the government of the United States should actively use its influence and good offices to restore peace and give independence to the island."

Mr. President, when that declaration was read before the St. Louis convention, over which I had the distinguished honor to preside, it was greeted with a mighty shout which

seemed to lift the very roof of that great convention hall, and it was adopted as a part of the platform of the Republican party by unanimous vote. On the 29th day of June, 1896, William McKinley, standing upon his vine-clad porch at Canton, Ohio, in accepting the nomination then officially tendered him, said:

"The platform adopted by the Republican national convention has received my careful consideration and has my unqualified approval. It is a matter of gratification to me, as I am sure it must be to you and Republicans everywhere and to all our people, that the expressions of its declaration of principles are so direct, clear, and emphatic. They are too plain and positive to leave any chance for doubt or question as to their purport and meaning."

That platform of the Republican party, that indorsement by its nominee for President, was ratified by more than seven million American voters. That platform has marked my path of duty from the hour of its adoption up to the present time.

It is an honored boast of the Republican party that it always keeps its promises and that its platform declarations are always carried out by its administrations. I have no reason to doubt, I have every reason to believe, that the present Chief Magistrate of the United States still stands upon the platform of the Republican party. I have no reason to doubt, I have every reason to believe, that he will make its fulfilment a part of the glorious history of the world.

Mr. President, that platform was adopted almost two years ago. Has there been any such change in the Cuban situation as to relieve the Republican party from its obligations? None whatever. There has been no change except such as to strengthen the force of our platform assertion that Spain has lost control of the island. Twice within the last two years I