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NO. 11. KALAMAZOO OPINION ON THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

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KALAMAZOO OPINION ON THE SPANISH WAR

The feelings of the people of Kalamazoo toward the Spanish War, as reflected by the Kalamazoo Gazette, cannot be fully understood if they are separated from the other contemporary characteristics of the national psychology. They, after all, were a part of a public opinion which was formed and reformed by issues which the entire nation was constantly confronted with. Among these characteristics was an intense and chauvinistic patriotism. There was compassion for the underdog, as well as suspicion of the upper crust of "coupon clippers"¹ exemplified by Mark Hanna. Sympathy with McKinley's vacillations in matters of state alternated with impatience. The motives of a growing country with many interests would not be expected to be unchanging, nor would they be expected to be unanimous throughout the country. In Kalamazoo, as in other localities, and then as at any other time, public opinion rose and fell and reversed itself in answer to the events of the time.

The record of the Spanish rule of Cuba was one of mistreatment and cruelty. Her inability to keep colonies in this hemisphere as other nations did was accredited to her policy of getting the most from her dependents while giving the least possible in return. The bad government of Cuba was chronic, but not until after the start of the rebellion of 1895 did the American people join in the cause of the rebels. Even then, although the war of extermination continued, the sincere desire of Spain for peace mollified the attitude of the American

¹Kalamazoo Gazette, hereafter referred to as Gaz. April 8, 1898

government. President McKinley, in his annual address of December, 1897, repudiated the idea of intervention and asked that Spain be given a reasonable chance to achieve unmolested a more desirable state of affairs.

The people were equally cautious, especially in the light of a recent controversy regarding the amount of money being regularly paid in pensions to Civil War veterans. With this desire of not creating more pensioners in mind, the Gazette remarked: "Indiscreet people who want to swallow Spain at one mouthful talk through their hats. It sounds very much like the talk of the lunatics who were going to walk all over the south in three months. Our contest with Spain would be principally on the water. In the way of battleships the two navies are about equal, but Spain has thirty-two torpedo boats to our one. Uncle Sam would surely win in the end, but we should bear in mind that the present pension list is about as large as the tax payer is able to stand."¹

Shortly after, the Gazette soberly advised that the government should lose no time in preparing for an emergency. Indications were that Madrid was incensed with this country, since officials there believed that if Americans had not furnished arms and ammunition, there would have been no rebellion. The prospect for continued peace was not at all reassuring.²

The fact that the Cuban question was ominously in the foreground caused three resolutions to be introduced in the Senate on the eighth day of February. Senator Mason presented a resolution asking that the

¹Gaz. February 1, 1898

²Gaz. February 10, 1898

United States notify Spain that the war must cease, and that we declare peace to exist. Senator Allen's resolution provided that the United States recognize the belligerency of Cuba, while Senator Cannon's went a step farther by saying the independence of Cuba should be recognized, giving Spain until March 4 to act.¹

Mason's proposals caused a comment by the Gazette. It said that were they passed, immediate war was inevitable, contrary to the wishes of nine out of ten people. Meanwhile, it conceded that the time for recognition of the belligerency of the Cubans might be right, since that did not necessarily mean war.²

On the fifteenth of February, 1898, the American battleship Maine was sunk in the harbor at Havana. The cause of the explosion was unknown, and a naval court of investigation was immediately set up. The Gazette was non-committal. According to it, all the theories advanced were guesswork, and one guess was as good as another.³

Excitement and hysteria in anticipation of a glorious war in the name of humanity had not yet captured the editor of the Gazette, A. J. Shakespeare, when he analyzed the situation--with probably more truth than he realized: "The perpetual jabber about war is tiresome...For nearly two years we have talked about war with Spain. Before Spain became a subject of irritation, we were counting noses and guns and measuring them in our minds against the equipment of Great Britain. No sooner are we through with one pipe dream of war than we engage in another sanguinary encounter. And why? Nobody knows."⁴

¹Gaz. February 9, 1898

²Gaz. February 10, 1898

³Gaz. February 19, 1898

⁴Gaz. February 20, 1898

And again two days later Shakespeare struck a note of truth when he recognized the American reaction to the sinking of the Maine as the mob hysteria that caused French demonstrations in the Dreyfus case. He urged that if there had to be a war, it should be gone into in a businesslike manner.¹

Extreme and cruel measures employed by the Spanish governor of Cuba, General Weyler, against non-combatants as well as against the rebels had deeply aroused the entire American people. Kalamazoo was no exception, and even for at least a month after the sinking of the Maine the atrocities continued to be foremost among the justifications for a war with Spain, if there was to be one. "We cannot go to war on account of the disaster to the Maine unless Spain is responsible for it. But that has nothing to do with the barbarous war that has so long devastated Cuba and the government has a right to ignore it and decide what is best to be done with regard to the rebellion on its own merits."² Several days later the following appeared: "Let the cause of the disaster to the Maine be what it may, there is no sensible reason why the United States should not recognize the belligerency of the Cubans and then if Spain wants to fight we will have to accommodate her and the consequences will be on her head."³

At the same time, however, a more conciliatory attitude was also voiced when a statement by William Jennings Bryan was quoted: "In my opinion we should be slow to act in the Maine affair, especially under the trying circumstances which confront us. Another fact which in my

¹Gaz. February 22, 1898

²Gaz. March 1, 1898

³Gaz. March 8, 1898

mind impels to exercise discretion is that the official investigation of the explosion is now being made. The United States cannot afford to be too hasty in this matter. International questions are involved, and it would be a sad compliment to our government were we openly and maliciously to bring about strained relations by our anxiety to locate the responsibility of the Maine disaster. The proper policy in my mind is for the United States to investigate the disaster carefully, and if the evidence tends to attach the responsibility where the people assert it properly belongs is found, then it will be time for such action to be taken. Politically or otherwise, the patriotism of the American people has never been appealed to in vain, but undue haste at this time might involve us in a disastrous conflict for which there would be no sufficient cause."¹

Also in the spirit of conciliation was the sermon of Reverend Reed Stewart of Detroit, part of which was quoted and is as follows: "To forgive an injury is better than to revenge it, for nations as well as for individuals. Because so many of our citizens have gone to death in a foreign and unfriendly port, shall we send a hundred thousand more to slaughter, and sacrifice as many more of the citizens of Spain? Human welfare is the same for Spain and for us."²

However, the evidence increasingly seemed to point towards war. No report was issued by the committee appointed to investigate the cause of the sinking of the Maine, but the government continued to prepare for war and to get in shape generally for trouble.³ By the twentieth of

¹Gaz. March 3, 1898

²Gaz. March 9, 1898

³Gaz. March 6, 1898

March, the Gazette admitted it did not see how war could be averted. Clara Barton, at work among the starving Cubans, had reported that she believed 500,000 persons had been crowded into Spanish fortified towns and allowed to starve to death. It was thought that such oppression would surely drive the president to act.¹

During the days and months preceding the war, the people of Kalamazoo largely supported the policies of President McKinley. Confidence in him was voiced at the time when the National Defense Act allowing \$50,000,000 for national defense passed unanimously. The feeling was that he and his advisors were competent and well-informed, and that the decision for or against war could well be left to them.²

On one occasion in particular, local support was clearly shown. A.J. Shakespeare defended McKinley from the attack of a Washington correspondent after he stated that he would rather see his administration wrecked than be responsible for plunging this country into an unholy war: "That is a patriotic, christian utterance and will be endorsed by all sensible people. We most emphatically endorse the president's position."³

Shortly after, A.J. Shakespeare again defended him from a statement in what he had on a previous occasion scathingly called, "The columns of slush printed in the metropolitan press from day to day."⁴ He said, "The blunderbus criticisms of the president by the editors of the yellow journals has about as much effect on the people as if it was not made. The president has shown himself in this emergency, cool-headed and

¹Gaz. March 20, 1898

²Gaz. March 9, 1898

³Gaz. March 22, 1898

⁴Gaz. March 1, 1898

trustworthy. So far as this blowing up of the Maine is concerned, no action can be taken until the report of the investigating commission is received and its contents known, and if it is found that we must go to war with Spain, the country will be in some condition for a conflict. Modern warfare is an entirely different thing from what it was when nations went to war with smooth bore cannons and smooth bore muskets. The heads of the war and navy departments are at work as busily preparing for war as if it already existed and cheap criticism will please no one but the unthinking."¹

As the days wore on, no action was taken. The public became more and more impatient with the delays. The following editorial gives clearly the idealism behind American interest in the Cuban situation as well as the feeling toward McKinley: "Unless the Spanish government accedes to the demands of the United States tomorrow noon, President McKinley will send to congress a formal report of the situation and the representatives of the people will decide, now that every effort has been made to bring about the freedom of Cuba by peaceful means, that the American people must stand firm for the holy war waged not for conquest, prestige or pride but for the spread of liberty, the good of humanity and the ending of the wrong that has so long been tolerated. The delay caused by the peace negotiations has been taken advantage of by the Spaniards while the United States has also been preparing for the conflict if war there must be. The first round will as a consequence be less

¹Gaz. March 24, 1898

decisive in its results than it would have been had the chief executive acted with a more staid purpose. Many lives may be sacrificed as a result but the final outcome will be the same. Spanish colonial rule will be wiped out of the western hemisphere and the death of the Maine's sailors will be emphatically avenged."¹

Several days later the Gazette said openly that it could see no reason for the president's failure to give his message to congress since Americans in Cuba had had two or three weeks in which to evacuate the island and could therefore no longer be used by him as an excuse for inaction.²

Much of the dislike for McKinley was a result of the distrust felt for the man who made him president, Mark Hanna. The spirit of finance capitalism was a bogey to the common man at the turn of the century. It was felt that bondholders controlled every power of the world and that human life and liberty were regularly sacrificed for interest-paying bonds, in spite of the seriousness of an international situation.³ And as far as the American people were concerned, Hanna was the chief of the bond-holding class, exerting a deadly influence in favor of the mercantile interests upon the chief executive. A dollar-bedecked effigy of him was hanged one night on South Burdick Street. On it were numerous placards on which were written, "Wait Till I Sell my Bonds," "Wait Till Monday," "Wait Until April 33," and "Be Firm, Mack."⁴ Afterwards the effigy was

¹Gaz. April 3, 1898

²Gaz. April 7, 1898

³Gaz. April 7, 1898

⁴Gaz. April 9, 1898

said to be the work of some small boys, but it probably was indicative of the feeling of a majority of Kalamazoo's citizens.¹

Although the Gazette's reporting of the Hanna effigy was jovial and sympathetic, the paper had no use for similar treatment accorded to the president in various sections of the country. "There is a certain respect due to the president of the United States and every person should be taught to accord."² But here the defense was in behalf of the office, not the personality.

The suspicion of McKinley's protection of capitalists was expressed at one time in this way: "It will be thirty-three years since General Lee surrendered at Appomatox. Will President McKinley observe the anniversary by surrender to congress and the will of the people? There are republicans who believe he is more likely to surrender to Spain and the Spanish bond holders."³

However, the editor, who was at that time not A.J. Shakespeare, but General Shakespeare, conceded that administering the affairs of a big nation during wartime is like carrying an umbrella on a windy day; everybody thinks he could manage it better than the one who has held of the handle.⁴ Evidently he was not completely out of sympathy with "the one who had hold of the handle."

General Shakespeare was not entirely consistent, for two days after the above appeared, an article called "Peace With Honor" followed:

¹Gaz. April 10, 1898
²Gaz. April 10, 1898
³Gaz. April 8, 1898
⁴Gaz. April 16, 1898

"President McKinley's message does not please Premier Sagasta who declares that it is deplorable. There are many citizens of the United States who agree with him but not for the same reason. What the Americans object to is the merchantile spirit which is apparent throughout the entire message proclaiming clearly to the world that our national honor is balanced by an eye to the chance of trade. Thrift and economy are good things and sit well on the merchant, but are decidedly unbecoming when brought into such a conspicuous light in a grave national issue. There is something disgusting in the attitude of a nation when it puts love of gold above the love of country and national honor. The state of Ohio has produced many statesmen whom the historians have justly praised but how will they speak of the boodie accused acquisition to congress from that state? Marcus Hanna carries into practice as a senator, the mercantile instincts which made him a millionaire, and by his influence which the chief executive injects this commercial sentiment into a mess from which it should have been totally eliminated...."¹

"Mr. Hanna said that none but tramps and loafers desire war. Such a remark was a gross insult to the intellectual liberty-loving people of this country, and it is truly a deplorable spectacle when such a man can wield a potent influence over the chief magistrate of a great people. Many true Americans believe that President McKinley has the heart of a genuine American and would deal with discretion with the problem that has confronted him but for the influence of the senator who made him president.

¹Gaz. April 16, 1898

Let the spirit of commercialism be driven from congress and let us hear no more of cost to the people when their honor is at stake, and humanity calls us to end this suspense which has hung like a nightmare over the country since the disaster of the Maine."¹

As was to be expected, the looming war was the subject of much discussion at Kalamazoo College. On April 6, the president, Dr. Slocum, spoke in chapel, commending President McKinley's efforts to maintain an honorable peace. Upon the motion of G.B. Smith, of the class of 1898, a telegram was signed by the faculty and students and sent to the White House, endorsing its policies.

The issues were aired extensively at meetings of the men's societies of the College, which then possessed a distinctly literary tone. The Sherwoods, on April 15, listened to a speech by a fellow member, O.T. Crissey, called the "President's Message." He was in accord with the attempt to maintain an honorable peace also, but felt there was then ample justification for extreme measures.²

At the same meeting, E.H. Andrews reviewed the history of Spain's misrule of Cuba from the fourteenth century, saying that 200,000 people had been starved to death during the "Ten Years War" alone. He quoted his figure from one Senator Proctor, but one might well wonder how authentic it is, since it is far less than half the number given by Clara Barton. (See page 6.)³

¹April 16, 1898

²Gaz. April 16, 1898

³Gaz. April 16, 1898

Also on the Sherwood program was a talk by E.H. Andrews, which is very typical, not only of the thought but of the language and flavor of the day. He said, "While America has been deliberating, Spain has been at work, and today has a navy nearly, if not quite equal to that of the United States. Since last November, Spain has launched several formidable vessels, while our navy is greatly weakened by the loss of the Maine. Spain has been gathering her fleet at the Canary Islands and has also sent many troops there. But Spain has lost the support and sympathy of other nations. Her policy of dishonesty and treachery will not be upheld by the powers of the old world. May the time come soon when her cruel hand shall cease to rule in any part of this hemisphere. I wish our football team could charge down the streets of Havana and sweep every Spanish don into the sea."¹

A more cautious tone was evident when Wilbur Nelson said that Spain's resources must not be understated. Spain had been busily preparing and was a powerful nation. Although nine million citizens in private life were ready to go to the front when their country called, we had only 25,000 in the regular standing army.²

During the same evening, the members of the Philolexian Lyceum also showed much patriotic zeal as they debated the question, "Resolved, that a war between the United States and Spain would be beneficial to the United States." The affirmative points were that (1) corruption increases in time of peace, (2) the United States would not be the aggressor since

¹Gaz. April 16, 1898

²Gaz. April 16, 1898

it did not take the initiative in this affair, (3) war would unite our North and South, (4) it would not be attended with great losses in commerce, (5) and that the outcome would be certain since Anglo-Saxons were always the best soldiers. The negative side contended that (1) war would cost the United States three hundred million dollars and would be detrimental to our commerce, (2) Spain was better prepared than Americans thought, (3) and war settled nothing and was against the revealed will of God.¹ In spite of the supposed support of God, the decision was not given in favor of the negative.

On the twenty first of April, when war seemed inevitable, President Slocum made use of the chapel period to repeat his support of the president's policies. He went on to advise the men students: "This trouble with Spain will be no three months of recreation time. It is not now probable that Spain will withdraw without a fight. I have followed the preparations for war with much interest. The call for volunteers that is being made shows that it is not expected that the regulars or even the militia can do all the work, whether or not the time has come for a general enlistment I am not sure. There are many men who can enlist without materially interfering with their own work. During the last war this college like others sent its full quota. With reference to yourselves I have no doubt that if the time should come for a general enlistment a large number would go out from this college. But as it now is I hope you will consider whether you are called on to go and leave your work. At any rate you should consult with your parents if possible and get their

¹Gaz. April 16, 1898

consent if possible. I therefore wish you to consider well this matter before going to the front. I will be the last one to say nay if you deem it necessary to go. If it is clear that the nation needs your services, I would, as I say be the last one to say to you nay."¹

The annual open meeting of the Philolexian Lyceum was held in the chapel, which was appropriately decorated with buntings in the national colors. The program was highlighted by a poem, "Cuba Libre," which was written and read by G.W. Sigler.

CUBA LIBRE

Heir of liberty and right
All unused to war's alarms
In your consciousness of might
Waiting for the call to arms.

Pause awhile upon the brink;
Ere your name goes on that rail,
Look within yourself and think
Of the motives in your soul.

He who seeks to find in wars,
Praise of men, or selfish gain,
Bears no glorious battle scars,
But the brand and curse of Cain.

Spur no ambition from your sight
Love of conquest cast afar;
Noble is the love of right,
Base and low the love of war.

Shall that starry flag beloved
To the hearts of freemen, wave
O'er him whose heart is moved
By the motives of a slave?

In the case of Cuba free
Make each sabre stroke a prayer,
For Americans should be
Worthy of the name they bear.²

¹Gaz. April 22, 1898

²Gaz. April 22, 1898

On the thirteenth of April it was reported that the war might after all be averted. Spain had, at the solicitations of the Pope and others, agreed to an unconditional armistice.¹ The hope for an honorable peace was again dragged out, but did not materialize. Congress insisted on an immediate withdrawal of troops from Cuba, and was backed by public opinion in Kalamazoo completely; "The action of congress means war. Spain stubbornly refuses to listen to the suggestions of this country, and there is no alternative but to fight. The government will be backed by the unanimous sentiment of the country, and there can be one result of the contest, and that will be to free Cuba and drive the Spaniards from Cuba."² It was reiterated that no one could accuse President McKinley of having been hasty. Even at the last moment he was giving the Spanish government time in which to prepare.³

As a war declaration became imminent, Americans began to look at their opponent in a slightly more realistic way. The Gazette had previously boasted that were Spain laid inside Texas, Texas would have 76,686 square miles to spare. In addition, the populations of four states taken together would be larger than Spain's total population-- and our people were more intellectual, too! The question no longer was should, or even would, there be a war, but rather what was the nature of the war going to be.⁵

¹Gaz. April 13, 1898

²Gaz. April 15, 1898

³Gaz. April 20, 1898

⁴Gaz. March 4, 1898

⁵Gaz. April 20, 1898

Although there never was the slightest doubt as to the outcome, the length of the war was a subject of speculation. The Gazette prophesied that it would be mainly a naval war, fought off the northern coast of Cuba. The first move would be to take Havana, and this might prove to be no small undertaking.¹ A few days later the tone was less positive, except as to the outcome; "The opinions vary greatly in this country as to the plan of warfare and the results of the first engagements--they all agree as to the final outcome although the length of time to accomplish a complete victory is questionable. The cause for war is believed by every true American to be just. It is not a political warfare but one for humanity and the patriots who are willing to fight for the cause are ample."²

Just before the declaration, strategy was again discussed by General Shakespeare: "The American fleet is already in motion, but those who expect Spain's fleet will come over to Cuba will probably be disappointed. It is not expected by those who know the Spaniard best that there will be any square fighting--but the United States will have to guard well all spots where it is possible for a Spanish ship to sneak in and do damage. The good fortune of this country lies in the fact that her effective forces are much nearer the scene of action than are those of her adversary. Excepting our commerce on the high seas, there is nothing that Spain can quickly strike. If fortresses are to be bombarded, their guns should be turned against the Spanish fleets by

¹Gaz. April 15, 1898

²Gaz. April 20, 1898

the time they arrive. The hours between now and the date the president fixed for Spain's acceptance or evasion of the challenge may be of precious value in determining the duration, though not the final outcome of the war. It is not likely that any risks will be taken in an endeavor to reduce the Spanish defenses at the entrance of Havana harbor by direct attack. The large guns of Morro might do even the modern battleship a good deal of damage, and it is not designed to take any steps that will reduce the number of any of the warships, but those of the enemy. It is true, as a high naval officer is reported to have said, that it would take a long time to reduce Havana by starvation, but it can be done provided the Spanish fleet does not meddle too successfully with the blockading fleet."¹

The news of the war declaration, the subject of voluminous writing, was itself concise. The special bulletin from Washington read: "The bill declaring war to exist, which was passed by the house and senate amid the wildest enthusiasm was signed by the president at 6:45 this evening."²

Reactions were numerous and immediate in Kalamazoo. Its first contingent of young men, Company C, 2nd Regiment of the Michigan National Guards, left for military service the following day. To show their respect, the City Council, the Chamber of Commerce, and groups of business men each turned out as a body and joined the citizenry in giving the regiment a rousing send-off.³ The streets were profusely decorated with flags and bunting, and the crowd was merrily celebrating the gala

¹Gaz. April 22, 1898

²Gaz. April 25, 1898

³Gaz. April 26, 1898

occasion. But still, there were a few sobre faces which reflected sad hearts as goodbyes were said to husbands and sons. The common thought at the gathering was that the war was to free a people from butchery and starvation.¹

Kalamazoo's citizens had not waited for the government to declare war to begin their own preparations. As early as February a company of volunteers to go to Cuba or wherever else they were needed was organized.² About the middle of April, Samuel J. Dunkley, the area's celery king, wired his representative at Washington. He tendered his services to the president and was ready to raise a regiment from among the workers in his celery fields.³

The Gazette hailed John Wanamaker as the shining example for all patriotic merchants to emulate. Wanamaker not only offered to hold a job for any employee of his that joined the armed forces, but he would continue to pay him his salary during his absence. In the event that he were killed, \$1,000 would be awarded to his heirs.⁴ Shortly after, a local department-store owner made the same offer to his help.⁵

For a week before the war was officially begun, the flag was unfurled everywhere. Nearly every house was decorated and demonstrations were spirited and exciting. Forty-eight men--business men, professional men, artisans, farmers, and veterans--volunteered to join the reserves in a single day. A score of young men paraded the streets at midnight

¹Gaz. February 24, 1898

²Gaz. April 27, 1898

³Gaz. April 27, 1898

⁴Gaz. April 13, 1898

⁵Gaz. April 21, 1898

carrying banners on which were printed, "Cuba Libre," and "Down With Spain." During the day bands played and there were the inevitable speeches.¹

The servicemen of Kalamazoo were zealously supported. The Patriotic Aid Society was organized by a few women who met at the First Presbyterian Church and elected Mrs. J.C. Burrows to serve as their president. Their purpose was to sew for soldiers and send them boxes of needed articles. Their projects received whole-hearted support from the town, as did other projects similar to them.²

The boundless patriotism of Kalamazoo was accompanied by a supreme confidence in the nation's forces. The war had hardly begun before the end was in sight, in the opinions of some, at least. "The war with Spain has been in progress now about two weeks. The contest between the most powerful country on the globe against the most treacherous and a third rate tottering nation. That the end is considered in sight is not at all strange and if the naval officers are far enough distant so as not to be hampered by the strategist board it would seem as though the end could not be far distant...Nearly every nation is now asking that Spain sue for peace and the pope has requested in the name of humanity that the queen regent end the conflict. If she does not perhaps Admiral Sampson will have an opportunity to give her another reminder that she would have ^{been} better off if she had sued for peace before the war began."³

¹Gaz. April, 21, 1898

²Gaz. June 25, 1898

³Gaz. May 7, 1898

Admiral Dewey's victory at Manila boosted the American ego still farther. People crowded downtown Kalamazoo streets and the court house square until the crowd became the largest the police had ever been called upon to contend with. Civil War veterans assembled and paraded. Volunteer reserves rigged up an old stagecoach to look like a naval flagship, symbolizing the outdated ship which Dewey commanded. There were more speeches, slogans, bugle calls, and bonfires--all celebrating the superiority of American intellect, training, gunnery, strategy, and dash.¹

America at that time was still proving herself to the powers of the world, and she very painfully felt the down-the-nose glances of Europe. Her chauvinism was clearly expressed by General Shakespeare immediately following Dewey's victory: "All Europe is amazed at Dewey's marvelous victory. It is conceded that the marksmanship of the Americans must have been phenomenal, and that every shot counted. This war will put a stop to the sneering of the European press and military men at Americans. It will demonstrate that we are perfectly competent to take care of ourselves, even if we do not support an immense standing army."² And again with an eye to proving the United States to Europe, he said that one certain result of the war would be that American ships would have gained a reputation worthy of themselves, and America's importance as a maritime power would be increased.³ After the war in another editorial General Shakespeare stated: "The eyes of Europeans have been opened widely by our conduct of the Spanish-American War. They see America

¹Gaz. May 8, 1898

²Gaz. May 10, 1898

³Gaz. August 7, 1898

now in a different light than ever before. They have studied our warships and armies as well as our iron trade."¹

The war gave the Gazette a chance to put in a word for the Nicaraguan Canal project. The need for such a canal was more apparent then, although it would be beneficial to commerce after the war. According to the editor, the importance of connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific during peacetime should have been sufficient reason to warrant its construction.² Business and commerce were expected to increase because of the large expenditures of the government, which would increase the circulation of money.³ Later it was added to the argument that the canal would save commercial vessels thousands of miles of travel. Also, the navy would be able to concentrate its Atlantic and Pacific fleets within a matter of days, rather than weeks.⁴

As the war progressed the heat of war enthusiasm cooled. The Cuban death traps into which American troops fell dampened the ardor of Kalamazoo's young men. However, she continued to supply all the volunteers that were required. Many men from this locality went into training, but never were sent overseas. They were generally anxious to go to Cuba and share the honors as long as they had gone through the camp programs of drills, skirmishes, and forced marches.⁵

Optimism was heightened by the victory at Santiago on June 6, and talk of peace became more current. In discussing the peace terms,

¹Gaz. August 16, 1898
²Gaz. May 13, 1898
³Gaz. May 21, 1898
⁴Gaz. August 3, 1898
⁵Gaz. July 17, 1898

the question of the disposition of the Philippine Islands was important. General Shakespeare first stated that we owed it to the insurgents to retain them. Insurgents there had given the United States valuable aid, and even then were planning to capture Manila. There was no occasion to desert either allies or new possessions.¹

This viewpoint favoring retention of the Philippines was modified, however, and freedom for the Islands seemed to be the desirable thing.² President McKinley saw no need for keeping them as permanent possessions, but rather, we should secure coaling rights there.³ In this he was supported by public opinion since it appeared that the Filipino dictator Aguinaldo would be fully as troublesome as the Spaniards had been.⁴ The Gazette agreed that retaining the Islands would mean a far greater responsibility to a faraway people than the returns would warrant.

It was reported that the Queen of Spain with tearful eyes had implored her ministers to find a way to end hostilities.⁵ On the 26th of July, Spain sued for peace through the French ambassador. The United States was ready for peace, and the Gazette's comment was that Spain should be met halfway. It went on to reiterate that the war was a terrible thing, and the United States had tried repeatedly to avoid it before she was finally drawn in by popular sentiment against the misrule of Cuba. Now Spain must withdraw and Cuba must receive a just government. Porto Rico would be taken by the United States to partly pay for the

¹Gaz. June 12, 1898
²Gaz. July 23, 1898
³Gaz. August 13, 1898
⁴Gaz. July 29, 1898
⁵Gaz. July 27, 1898

war, and the Philippines would serve as an indemnity.

On the fourteenth of August, peace was announced. The editorial called, "Peace, Sweet Peace," was enthusiastic, but it admitted that the trouble was not over; "...Spain shall relinquish all claim or sovereignty over Cuba; that Porto Rico and the Spanish islands in the West Indies with an island in the Ladrones shall be ceded to the United States; and that the city, bay, and harbor of Manila shall be held by the United States pending of conclusion of a formal treaty of peace which shall determine the control, disposal, and government of the islands."

"The troubles of this country are not yet over by any means. The settling of affairs in Cuba will be slow and tedious on account of the bitter feeling existing between the halfbreed insurgents and the Spanish residents. While Cuba has been badly governed by Spain, the average mixed native is a poor specimen of humanity. Ignorant, lazy, shiftless, dishonest, and nowhere as intelligent or decent as the original American Indian. A very large majority of these people are totally unfit for self-government. Liberty to their comprehension is license, and they will have to be kept in proper subjection, which will be found no small matter....The same trouble is not apprehended with regard to Porto Rico, as it is said that the people are of a much higher order. It is the general belief of those that are best able to judge that the less we have to do with the Philippine Islands, the better. The inhabitants of those islands are said to be even more intractible, ignorant, and vicious than the native Cuban."¹

¹Gaz. August 14, 1898

As Kalamazoo looked back upon the achievements of the country during the war, it was apparently surprised by its accomplishments. The war had lasted three months and twenty-two days, which seemed to be a marvellously short time. In that period an army of over 200,000 volunteers was raised and equipped. Transports were obtained, troops were taken overseas, and victories were won on both land and sea. The results were regarded to be of incalculable value to future generations.¹

Another viewpoint on the war's value aired by General Shakespeare was that it would prove to be good for the islands, but disastrous to the American taxpayer.² That war was a horrible business was shown by the returning soldiers. For those who fought it, it was a terrible thing, yet each generation brought its demagogues with their followers who had to learn this from experience.³ Still the Gazette had tempered its attack on the war-mongers by returning to the old idea of the war's being inevitable: "But there is no use of kicking against fate. It was to be!"⁴

In the middle of September, ex-Secretary of State Sherman declared that the war had been unnecessary; he could have made a treaty for peace with Spain including the evacuation of Cuba, had the country been desirous of one. The responsibility rested upon Congress, which sent the exasperating ultimatum to Madrid and then declared the war. The Gazette concurred with the opinion that the conflict was unnecessary also, so apparently the feeling in Kalamazoo was divided on this point.⁵

¹ Gaz. April 16, 1898

² Gaz. September 2, 1898

³ Gaz. September 3, 1898

⁴ Gaz. September 2, 1898

⁵ Gaz. September 15, 1898

Throughout the country there was much criticism of the Santiago campaign conducted by General Shafter. Many charged that the attack was premature and ill-advised.¹ However, General Shakespeare consistently defended Shafter from all attack; since Shafter had been born, raised, and educated in Kalamazoo County, this is not at all surprising. Kalamazoo's pride in its native son was unbounded. In fact, as the climax to a three-day street fair and as a demonstration of its affection, General Shafter was invited to participate in a peace jubilee parade on the sixth of October. Throngs of people greeted him with cheers and ovations.²

Kalamazoo was very much in sympathy, nevertheless, with the administration's decision to investigate the shortcomings of the campaign at Santiago.³ Still, in its opinion, the whole attack on the proceedings was wiped out by the one phrase of an English eyewitness, "They got there."⁴ Some critics blamed General Shafter for the lack of sufficient accommodations for the sick and wounded. To this the Gazette answered that he was there to fight, not to superintend hospitals.⁵ If he had postponed the action and waited until his men were debilitated with sickness and discouragement, the results would have been entirely different.⁶

It was admitted, however, that something had gone wrong and that gross blunders were committed in the quartermaster and medical departments. These could not be the responsibility of one man alone, and the man handling the fighting should not be expected to look after hard-tack,

¹Gaz. August 30, 1898

²Gaz. October 8, 1898

³Gaz. August 25, 1898

⁴Gaz. August 20, 1898

⁵Gaz. August 25, 1898

⁶Gaz. August 20, 1898

bacon, bandages, or salves.¹ Further, "The weakness of the American army as has been demonstrated in the Cuban campaign is not in the fighting end, but is in the medical, commissary, and quartermaster department...The business end of the American army wants a most thorough overhauling by a competent board of skilled American officers. There is no use of trying to make scapegoats of Generals Shafter and Alger. The trouble does not lie with any two men, but with the whole system."² The medical department should be an independent and self-governing branch, as was true in the English army. In this way it would escape the restrictive red tape of West Point graduates.³

After the war as well as during it, the Philippine Islands continued to be a subject for speculation. The islands had been misgoverned for nearly four-hundred years and were at that time looking to the United States for protection. It was the aim of the United States to give the Filipinos a chance to profit from the use of their rich resources and to let American capital and energy help them to take their place among the self-sustaining and self-governing peoples of the world.⁴

Two other statements regarding this territory were to be found in the pages of the Gazette. Admiral Dewey estimated that were this country to keep the Philippines, it would take 150,000 soldiers to keep them in a civilized state.⁵ Also, ex-secretary Sherman thought they were too far distant and the people too intractable to be profitable.⁶ With

¹Gaz. August 25, 1898

²Gaz. September 4, 1898

³Gaz. September 3, 1898

⁴Gaz. August 31, 1898

⁵Gaz. September 13, 1898

⁶Gaz. September 15, 1898

both of these men the Gazette agreed. It was in favor of giving the islands self-government, as Aguinaldo expected would be done, if the people were fit to receive it.¹

In the meantime, the report was circulated that Germany had made a business proposition to Spain. She wanted to pay Spain ninety millions for the Philippine Islands, and to enter into an alliance with Spain. Of course Spain was desperate for both money and friends among the countries of Europe. But if Premier Sagasta had any idea that the United States would not insist on abandonment of the islands by Spain, he was very much mistaken. The Gazette had been in the hands of a new editor, James E. Doyle, since the latter part of September, 1898. He was opposed to our relinquishing our claims and said, "We are not going to let Spain retain the islands or permit them to go to any other nation of Europe. We won them fairly, and will keep them no matter what Kaiser William will think about it. He got after the Philippines too late."²

The feeling here was somewhat different concerning Cuba and Porto Rico. Although Sherman opposed any extension of territory as being against both reason and the history of this country, the Gazette said they must come under American control since they were essential to the future military welfare of this country.³ In addition, the fertile soil, fine timber, and plentiful iron ore of Cuba should be brought under the control of American capital in spite of friction with the Cuban junta and the desire of many of the islanders for complete independence.⁴

¹Gaz. September 17, 1898

²Gaz. November 17, 1898

³Gaz. September 15, 1898

⁴Gaz. August 16, 1898

Meanwhile, the peace commissioners were meeting in Paris, deliberating upon these questions. The hotly contested elections of November 8 were blamed by Democrats upon the commissioners' failure to report. It was clear to Kalamazoo citizens that President McKinley did not intend to let the decision regarding the Philippines influence the election.¹

The people here were entirely opposed to giving Spain compensation for any territories which she was to lose. When word came from Paris that the commission might decide that the United States should pay forty or fifty millions in cash to Spain for the Philippines, the Gazette commented: "Paying a bonus for them is a queer way of securing a war indemnity, but after appointing a commission to find out if we had won a victory which Spain already conceded, there is nothing too absurd to be expected."²

The treaty ending the Spanish-American War was at last signed on December 10, 1898. A week later in a lengthy editorial, editor James E. Doyle expressed the sentiment here regarding annexation and the treaty. Kalamazoo opinion was inclined to support acceptance of the treaty, since the question at hand was simply the ratification of an agreement with Spain, which did not necessarily mean the final disposition of the territory relinquished by her. In addition, there were other considerations in favor of ratification: (1) it would be desirable for the United States to free itself of international complications and reach a position where it could decide the future of the islands by itself, (2) war would be

¹Gaz. October 25, 1898

²Gaz. November 9, 1898

formally brought to an end, (3) and all Spain's claims to sovereignty would be voided.

Casting aside partisanship, Doyle went on: "We are called upon to act as a nation. Our executive and his agents have dictated it, and they were chosen by the people as their representatives for the performance of such duties. We cannot consistently refuse to ratify their actions...It would be almost childish to repudiate his action...Although there are differing opinions on the wisdom of the treaty, the dignified course is to accept the situation and settle objections with our responsible representatives afterwards. Cuba, Porto Rico, and the Philippine Islands have passed out of the hands of Spain forever. That is settled. It is equally clear that their future is under the control of the United States. Whatever the American people decide shall be done with them will be done. There is no possibility of avoiding that fact, and it is equally clear that we must decide it ourselves. It would be useless to complicate that question with ratification of the treaty. That would simply be adding confusion to a very grave problem, whose wise solution will require the best efforts of the American people."

"It is wiser to do one thing at a time. The question is now ratification of the treaty. The future may have many unexpected things in store. The Gazette has very grave doubts as to the wisdom of the annexation policy. It is certainly breaking away from the traditional principles of the country and launching into a new and untried sea where appearances are not encouraging. At the same time, it is no time to

settle party issues....The responsibility of managing our national affairs rests with the republican party. It is not the part of wisdom to oppose for the sake of opposing."¹

In conclusion, it can be said that opinion in Kalamazoo concerning the Spanish-American War followed the same general outline as in other inland cities across the interior of the country. Although the sympathy of the people was with the suffering Cubans, they were understandably slow to commit themselves to a war for which there was no clearly-defined overt cause. Popular opinion increasingly demanded action, and support of the war which was subsequently begun was widespread. In spite of the definitely Democratic leanings of the community, the Republican administration was generally upheld in Kalamazoo. Here, as everywhere, there was great pride in the country's war accomplishments, and when the hostilities came to an end, there was a feeling of satisfaction at having given Europe evidence of American superiority. The conclusion of the war had brought many urgent problems to the very doorsteps of the people, but they felt confident of their destiny and were ready to assume their rightful place in the family of nations of the world.

¹Gaz. December 17, 1898

Source

The Kalamazoo Gazette 1897-1898