



OLD DARTMOUTH HISTORICAL SKETCHES

No. 63

Speech by W. Cameron Forbes before the Old Dartmouth Historical
Society, New Bedford, Mass., Oct. 21, 1932
on the Far Eastern Relations
of the United States

The Fall Meeting of the Old Dartmouth Historical Society was held in the Ship Room of the Bourne Museum on the afternoon of October 21, 1932. W. Cameron Forbes, former Governor General of the Philippines and Ambassador to Japan, addressed the Society on "Far Eastern Relations of the United States.

In introducing Mr. Forbes, Zephaniah W. Pease, President of the Society said that Mr. Forbes' grandfather, John M. Forbes, created a dynasty of Island governors. When a President of the United States looked around for a man to straighten out our island affairs, he considered the manner in which the island of Naushon had been governed for many years, the tranquility that had existed in this haunt of perfect peace, and he selected a descendant of the original governor to represent the nation in many islands, Haiti, the Philippines and Japan.

FAR EASTERN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES

ADDRESS BY W. CAMERON FORBES

The question naturally arises in the minds of thinking people why we should be in the Far East at all—what business have we there? But then the other question arises of why we should be where we are in America — what business have we here? And brought down to the comprehensible — or perhaps I might better say incomprehensible — unit of the individual the question arises “What are we doing here anyway?” The answer is that we are here. We find ourselves here through no volition of our own and the answer to what we are doing in the Orient is that we are there. We will leave the analyses of the causes of our finding ourselves in various places to metaphysicians and merely accept the fact that we find ourselves placed with certain obligations which we cannot dodge.

I have some trepidation in speaking to a New Bedford audience about conditions in the Orient, because by heredity and tradition many of you here know more about the Orient than I can ever hope to, but my recent sojourn in the Far East equips me to perhaps bring some of your information up to date and I know you will be interested in a brief survey of present conditions in China, without an understanding of which it is impossible to understand the Orient situation at all.

The Chinese, as a matter of fact, are a people with traditions, customs, territory and industry but very generally without government. What government they have lacks most of the conditions of public order, cohesion, adequate finance, transportation, machinery for administration of justice and for communications. The central government exercises only a limited control. It reaches only a large, perhaps hardly a major, fraction of the population of China proper and a still less proportion of the area. It is this lack of control exercised by the Chinese Government which explains in large measure Japanese difficulties in Manchuria. The Japanese people had an investment of something over a billion dollars in various Manchurian enterprises and these were jeopardized by the dis-organization, lack of public order, constant acts of brigandage which prevailed and also by their absolute failure in getting consideration of their grievances or redress on the part of what government did exist in Manchuria. There is no question of the justice of their grievances but I am not going to enter into a consideration of the course which they took in dealing with the situation, because this matter has been very ably handled by an International Commission, headed by Lord Lytton, which has made a report after so thorough a survey and consideration of Manchurian conditions that their findings are much more authentic than anything that I can hope to adduce.

The American member of this Commission, General McCoy, is a man in whose judgment I have supreme confidence. No one better equipped could have been selected to do just that sort of a survey. He had assisted General Wood in the administration first of the Moro Province and later as Governor-General in the Philippines. He had accompanied General Wood and me in our survey of the Islands for President Harding and assisted in the preparation of the report. He accompanied General Harbord in his survey of Armenia. He had conducted the presidential election in Nicaragua and mediated between Paraguay and Bolivia in endeavoring to settle their controversies. In short, his international experience is unequalled by that of any other man in the United States.

There is no doubt that China has been saved from a virtual partition, for concessionary purposes at least, among various nations by the firm attitude taken by the United States in announcing the policy of the Open Door, of which John Hay, then Secretary of State, secured international acceptance. Like the Monroe Doctrine, it has become a cardinal and fundamental principle of international policy. It means that in so far as it is carried out the day of special privilege and exclusive concession, forced upon China or purchased from her officials, is past and that all nations will in the future have equal rights to the use of ports and railroads and for obtaining opportunities for the development of enterprises.

The history of China contains far too many acts of selfish bulldozing on the part of powerful nations to be very pleasant reading and it is hoped that the future will not contain so many black pages.

When I say we are in the Orient I think more of the Philippine Islands than I do of China, where our footholds are very slight. The United States has the legal ownership of the Philippine archipelago which we declared we hold in trust for the Filipinos and we as a matter of historical fact turned back to the Filipinos a very large measure of the control of their own affairs. Not only that but we have given them the right to secure by homesteading and other reasonable methods their own land for private ownership. In my judgment we have fulfilled to the letter this trust which has been imposed upon us. Now the question arises — "What is our duty toward these people?" They, rightly or wrongly, harbor very generally the belief that the United States has promised them independence. There is a strong movement in the United States to get rid of them, fostered principally by selfish interests, to whose business Philippine products are competitive.

Now let me ask you to look at the map of Asia. It is fenced off from the Pacific Ocean by a fringe of islands that run from Kamchatka to Borneo. The northern two-thirds of these islands belong to Japan. The southern third belongs to the United States and gives us our approach to the great populations of Asia, where in the future world commerce must be of great importance. Congress has under consideration just now one or more bills

purporting to give the Philippine Islands independence. The one which passed the House by a very large majority last session in terms grants them independence at the end of eight years but as a matter of fact these bills in effect take away a good deal of the freedom which the Islands now have. They place, for instance, a limit on the amount of certain products which can be brought into the United States under the present situation in unlimited quantities and they exclude Filipinos in the main from free access to our shores. There are good reasons for some of these limitations but the point that I wish to emphasize is that we can't give a dependent people independence. It cannot be given; it must be achieved and just so long as the Filipinos are dependent for their finances, their prosperity and their protection on their relationship with the United States, to cut off all of these merely changes the nature of their dependence but it can't make them independent. The so-called Hawes Cutting Bill, now before the Senate, offers a solution which might give us a helpful way out of the situation. It provides for a supervised commonwealth for the next fifteen years and after ten years the imposition of a graduated tax on articles exported from the Philippine Islands to the United States, which would give them a fore-taste of what they would have to do if they had to pay duty. At the end of fifteen years they would have the right to vote to see whether they wanted to continue their commonwealth status, with free trade limited in regard to certain specialties, or have a complete political separation. Meanwhile we have developed, under American administration, a very noteworthy trade with the Philippine Islands, reaching as high as \$200,000,000 a year in good years. If we can get a trade of \$200,000,000 a year with 10,000,000 Filipinos, just imagine the possibilities of trade with China with 400,000,000 industrious and thrifty people.

The possibilities of future trade with the Orient simply stagger the imagination and it behooves us therefore to retain the policy of the Open Door in China as a cardinal element of policy. We should maintain our trade routes and our friendly relations with all the peoples on the other side. They are fortunately friendly now. We have no excuse for real dissension and no possible excuse for war with any Oriental country and the policy of our administration in regard to the China and Japan imbroglio is entirely defensible and correct. It is the policy of hands off and of waiting for the situation to clear itself without any interference on our part.

