

Should the report be confirmed that Count Valmaseda, Commander of the Spanish forces in the Eastern Department of Cuba, has actually issued the proclamation that came last week by telegraph, the fact will do more than could anything else not only to alienate the sympathies of the world from Spain and warm all hearts toward her insurgent foes, but to dash the young hope of her own resurrection. According to that proclamation, every native male over fifteen years of age, found away from his residence without sufficient cause, is to be executed. Every uninhabited dwelling, and every inhabited dwelling where a white flag shall be undisplayed, is to be burned. All women, absent from their homes, must come to Bajamo or Jignani; if they do not come of their own free choice, they will be forced to come. This is simply barbarous. It is war in the old brutal style; war against all the modern principles of war; war as it was conducted in the Middle Ages. It suggests the policy of Philip II. The barbarity is marked by that characteristic of utter contempt for the subject which signalized the operations of that most Catholic prince. We have been trying hard of late to think well of Spain, hoping sometimes against hope. We have read over again her history with kindly eyes; we have made generous allowance for her difficulties; we have pitied her sorrows, cheered her endeavors, put the most charitable construction on her blunders, estimated at their fullest value her national qualities, thrust forward boldly the promising features in her new efforts at administration, praised her Ministers, borne witness to the good conduct of her people, hailed with enthusiasm every indication of improvement in her civil system, greeted with hearty thanks her aspirations after liberty of thought, worship, and speech, bespoken for her the indulgence of the public opinion, and maintained a stout conviction that her painful travail would issue in her deliverance from the ancient thralldom of tradition; and now, in a moment, she turns upon us and bids us believe ourselves grievously mistaken. She is the same old Spain her calumniators, as we thought them, declared her to be—haughty, supercilious, cruel, reckless, scornful of the opinion and the feeling of the civilized world.

She could not, of course, be blamed for wishing to retain her possessions. Every nation on earth does that. All dismemberment is painful. We do not blame her for employing force to keep so precious a tributary as the Island of Cuba. Every nation on earth would do the same. But she is to blame for using force as no nation on earth would do who values its fair fame. War, unhappily, is not likely to pass away from the usages of people calling themselves civilized and bearing the name of Christian. Nay, it seems to be as prevalent as ever. The art of war is studied, the machinery of war is perfected to an extent never dreamed of till this generation. The engines of destruction are numerous and fearful beyond precedent. But at the same time, it is not the monster it used to be. If not divested of its physical terrors, it is to some degree divested of its moral hideousness. There is in its conduct far less of hate and vindictiveness than there was. Civilization comes in to protect all but actual belligerents in life and property. Humanity comes in to save even belligerents from all unnecessary suffering through exposure, wounds, and captivity. War is entered into reluctantly, under protest, and with something like an apology to the spirit of a better age. The element of murder is sternly prohibited and kept down. Not a life is wasted that can be spared; and the tenderest services of men and women are pressed into the field to mitigate the horrors that cannot be avoided. This is now the recognized rule among all people. A new conscience has been created in military and imperial breasts which will demand to be respected and obeyed. No nation is strong enough to disregard its decree. Least of all can a nation afford to disregard it that, like Spain, labors under the reproach of being behind the rest, and claims sympathy on the score of her purpose to cast the reproach off. She should lead the rest, and justify her title to praise, as well as her promise of attainment, by showing how well she appreciates the lessons that civilization has learned. Is this the way she proves herself to be worthy a place among the Great Powers? If it is, she may abandon all hope of ever re-writing her history, for she will turn against her the very hearts that were beating proudly in her cause of national regeneration, and the very hands that were ready to render all the help they could toward its victory. They who hoped to see her live will rejoice to see her die.