

BELGIUM AND A PHILIPPINE PROTECTORATE: A STILLBORN PLAN¹

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FROM APRIL THROUGH AUGUST 1898, THE UNITED STATES FOUGHT SPAIN in what Secretary of State John Hay described as "a splendid little war." Earlier, on April 30 and May 1, Commodore George Dewey conquered the Spanish fleet at Manila Bay, but the actual occupation of the city of Manila was delayed until August 13.²

In the interim between said battle and the final occupation of the city by the United States, Spanish authority hung tenuously in the balance. With Emilio Aguinaldo's Filipino troops besieging the city,³ and the war vessels of other major powers either in Manila Bay or anchored close to it, there was the gravest danger that the Americans might find themselves embroiled with other rivals for sovereign power.⁴

The ultimate disposition of the Philippines remained an enigma, largely because the United States desisted from public claims to possession of the islands through the entire summer and early fall of 1898. Even when a protocol was signed on August 12 at Washington drawing up the United States peace terms,⁵ nothing was said about American possession of the Philippines. Instead, Article III merely stated that: "The United States will occupy and hold the city, bay, and harbor of Manila pending the conclusion of a treaty of peace which shall determine the control, disposition, and government of the Philippines."⁶

¹ The research for this study was supported by a grant from the Towson State College Research Committee.

² William J. Sexton, *Soldiers in the Sun; An Adventure in Imperialism* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), pp. 45-46.

³ Jean Grossholtz, *Politics in the Philippines* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1964), pp. 22-23. For the military details see Richard H. Titherington, *A History of the Spanish-American War* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), pp. 350-378.

⁴ The United States press contained references to the fact that German warships in Manila Bay had cleared for action when Dewey had assumed the right to assign them anchorages there. The diplomatic corps at Washington also repeated the rumor that Great Britain had urged the United States to an annexionist policy in the Philippines. See Belgian Chargé d'affaires Maurice Joostens to Foreign Minister Paul de Favereau, December 9, 1898, No. 313, Washington, Belge, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères et du Commerce Extérieur (microfilmed diplomatic correspondence housed at the United States National Archives, cited hereinafter as "Belge, A. E."), Microcopy T 1113, LM43, Roll 12. See also Thomas A. Bailey, "Dewey and the Germans at Manila Bay," *American Historical Review*, Vol. XLV (1939), pp. 59-81.

⁵ The Washington Protocol was signed, on behalf of Spain, by French Ambassador Jules Cambon who had been granted plenipotentiary credentials by that country.

⁶ Message of President McKinley to the United States Congress, December 5, 1898, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898* (cited

On July 7, 1898 the United States Congress had passed a joint resolution completing the annexation of the Hawaiian Inlands.⁷ Subsequent to the actual ratification of the Hispano-American Peace of Paris, Germany had taken advantage of the shift in the Pacific balance of power by purchasing the Caroline Islands from Spain for five million dollars.⁸ It is not surprising then, that other maritime powers should have regarded the moment as opportune for self aggrandizement.

For some time, the Belgian foreign ministry had been in receipt of glowing reports concerning the resources and commercial potentialities of the Filipino archipelago. The author of those reports was Edouard André, Belgian consul at Manila, a businessman who had been resident at that city for fifteen years. At the close of the war, André had been granted leave to visit Brussels, primarily in order to raise capital for a new incorporated commercial enterprise he hoped to launch at Manila. At the same time, he was ordered to bring maps, samples of natural resources, and written reports giving as complete a picture as possible, of Filipino potentialities for Belgian enterprise. André was instructed to cross the United States by train, to report to the Belgian Minister at Washington, and to place himself at his orders before completing his journey to Brussels.⁹

On the personal initiative of King Leopold II, orders were sent to Count Lichtervelde, Belgian Minister to the United States, to do as much as was possible to persuade the Washington cabinet to appoint Belgian administrators to govern the conquered islands.¹⁰ It must be remembered that until the completion of negotiations for the Treaty

hereinafter as *Foreign Relations*) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), p. LXV. The evolution of President McKinley, from hostility to annexation, to support for the idea, and his well known rationalization for that change in position is well described in Garel A. Grunder and William E. Livezey, *The Philippines and the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), pp. 36-37.

⁷ *Foreign Relations, 1898*, p. LXXVII.

⁸ Message of the President to Congress, December 5, 1899, *Foreign Relations, 1899*, p. XXI.

⁹ André to Favereau, February 22, 1899, Belge, A.E., Microcopy T125, Roll 6. André had been called to the favorable attention of his own government when Rear Admiral George Dewey had publicly thanked him for having served as an intermediary between the contending forces, expediting the surrender of Manila, thereby reducing losses in life and property (U.S. Minister to Belgium Bellamy Storer to Favereau, October 14, 1898, Brussels, Belge, A.E., *ibid.*; Favereau to Storer, November 8, 1898, Brussels, *ibid.* The indefatigable consul also wrote lengthy reports and letters arguing against the fitness of the Filipinos for self-government. These documents were forwarded to Paris through the good offices of Admiral Dewey, where they were seriously considered by the American Peace Commissioners. Ironically, André's efforts were self defeating since they helped to decide the United States negotiators in favor of outright annexation of the islands. See Whitelaw Reid's Diary, October 4, 24, 1898, Lt. Wayne Morgan (ed.), *Making Peace with Spain; The Diary of Whitelaw Reid* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), pp. 55, 103.

¹⁰ Favereau to Lichtervelde, September 12, 1898, Direction P. No. 6121, Order 136, Brussels, *ibid.*

of Paris on December 10, 1898, no one knew whether the victors would annex the islands, declare a protectorate over them or recognize Emilio Aguinaldo's¹¹ republic in at least part of their territory. Apparently the king and Belgian foreign minister Paul de Favereau imagined that even if the islands were annexed outright to the United States, the Americans would welcome such a partnership with little, neutral Belgium. Favereau assumed that the victorious Americans would be happy to sweeten the pill for the other rival maritime powers by substituting a benign condominium for outright imperial aggrandizement.

Lichtervelde was warned to avoid any appearance of having taken the initiative in the matter. Instead, he was ordered to approach Monsignor John Ireland, Archbishop of St. Paul, Minnesota,¹² and persuade him to serve as intermediary with President McKinley and Secretary of State John Hay. Monsignor Ireland was specifically designated because the Belgians had noted with great interest the fact that he had already opened conversations with the president to safeguard Roman Catholic interests in Cuba.¹³ In addition, Lichtervelde knew that prelate personally, having recently enjoyed a long conversation with him, on that subject, at an intimate dinner tendered by the French ambassador.¹⁴ Favereau underlined the importance which the king placed upon the success of Lichtervelde's efforts to enlist the archbishop's support.¹⁵

¹¹ Aguinaldo had been transported from his exile at Hong Kong by Dewey and landed in the Philippines to raise a native army against Spain. When it became apparent, after the capture of Manila, that the United States had no intention of recognizing Aguinaldo's regime as the government of the islands, he withdrew to Malolos and made that the capital of the territories he held. When, ultimately, the Treaty of Paris provided for the outright sale of the Philippines to the United States, conflict ensued between Aguinaldo's forces and the Americans. The last major Filipino guerrilla force surrendered in April 1902. See Grossholtz, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23. Having lived to see the establishment of an independent republic in 1946, Aguinaldo made his peace with the United States when close to his ninetieth birthday. See Emilio Aguinaldo y Famy and Vicente A. Pacis, *A Second Look at America* (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1957).

¹² Monsignor Ireland and Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, both of whom are discussed at greater length later in this paper, were leading "Americanists." The Americanist doctrine, adopted by nineteenth century Catholic liberals, maintained that democracy was the wave of the future, and that the Roman Catholic Church in the United States could look forward to a great growth in the country, participating not only in the material prosperity of an industrialized country, but in its political life as well. Gibbons, especially, was intimate with all the Presidents of the United States from Grover Cleveland to William Howard Taft. The present writer is grateful to Reverend Father John J. Tierney, Archivist of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, for his cooperation in allowing him to examine the 60,000 piece manuscript collection of Cardinal Gibbons' papers. Although meticulously arranged chronologically, for the most part, the collections of letters from presidents, and royal personages are filed separately. Hereinafter, references to this collection will be cited, "Gibbons Papers."

¹³ Favereau to Lichtervelde, September 12, 1898, Brussels, Order 136, Belge, A.E., Microcopy T125, Roll 6.

¹⁴ Lichtervelde to Favereau, October 1, 1898, No. 252, Omaha, Belge, A.E., *ibid.*; same to same, October 6, 1898, No. 278, New York, *ibid.*

¹⁵ Favereau to Lichtervelde, September 12, 1898, No. 136, Brussels, *ibid.*

By happy coincidence, the Belgian envoy was returning from a vacation trip to Yellowstone, Wyoming when he was met at Omaha, Nebraska by his legation courier bearing Favereau's detailed instructions. He telegraphed the archbishop at St. Paul immediately to ask for an appointment. Ireland replied cordially, assuring Lichtervelde that he intended to visit the Bishop of Omaha immediately and that he would be happy to meet him at the latter's residence.¹⁶

Thus on the evening of September 30, 1898, the diplomat had the first of several long conversations with Monsignor Ireland on the subject of the potential role of Belgian administrators in the Philippines.¹⁷ As the Omaha Exposition was then open, the two men could visit the exhibits and continue their exchange of ideas without arousing the curiosity of newspapermen.¹⁸

For obvious reasons, Lichtervelde avoided describing the Belgianization of the Filipino civil service as an end in itself. Instead, he laid emphasis upon the advantages which would accrue to the church if the government of the islands were entrusted to the subject of a small, neutral, Roman Catholic state. At that moment, just as the peace conference was opening at Paris, Lichtervelde believed that the United States was actually "embarrassed by its victory," and would settle for outright possession of a Filipino naval station. In his report to his superiors, Lichtervelde expressed the frank opinion that King Leopold's proposal would be workable only if the Americans stopped short of annexing the archipelago outright. He added that in such an eventuality,

¹⁶ Lichtervelde to Favereau, October 1, 1898, No. 252, Omaha, *ibid.*

¹⁷ After his first meeting with Ireland at Omaha, Lichtervelde sent a ciphered telegram to Brussels, a copy of which was sent immediately to King Leopold. It stated: "He is sympathetic to our ideas and will speak of them eventually to the president, but thinks that a great uncertainty still reigns on the general future of the Philippines (same to same, October 1, 1898, unnumbered ciphered telegram, Omaha, *ibid.*). Upon hearing the rumor that the United States might take the Philippines, then give them to some other power, Count Hatzfeldt, the German Ambassador at London asked the British foreign secretary, Lord Salisbury, to describe his government's policy in such a case. Salisbury denied the validity of the rumor. See Salisbury to Sir Frank Cavendish Lascelles, May 11, 1898, Kenneth Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970) p. 455. In actual fact, British diplomatic policy encouraged the United States to annex the Philippines, but made it equally clear that if the Senate rejected annexation, Britain was to be given the first option to purchase the islands. See R. G. Neale, *Great Britain and United States Expansion, 1898-1900* (Michigan State University Press, 1966), p. 212.

¹⁸ The United States Government had formally invited the Belgian Government to create a special Belgian Section at the Omaha International Exposition. No interest had been shown in the idea, however, by Belgian industrialists. The Belgian foreign minister had offered the United States Minister at Brussels his regrets that there would be no Belgian Section at Omaha. See Favereau to Storer June 8, 1898, Brussels, U.S. National Archives, State Department Correspondence (hereinafter cited as U.S.N.A.) Microcopy 193, Roll T34. The visit of Count Lichtervelde to Omaha, could be described as merely a friendly gesture without political significance.

United States citizens of Roman Catholic faith would be the best guarantors of Catholic religious interests in the islands.¹⁹

If, in retrospect, the entire Belgian proposal seems naive and unrealistic, it was not rejected by the archbishop. Indeed, Ireland promised to discuss it with President McKinley "eventually." He also assured Lichtervelde that he would not inform the president that the proposal had been initiated by the Belgian government.²⁰

On both sides of the Atlantic, Belgian observers convinced themselves that events could be controlled by the sort of diplomatic minuet that Lichtervelde and the archbishop had considered. As late as mid-October, Secretary of State John Hay had predicted that the peace negotiations at Paris would be prolonged. Indeed, through that month, the Belgian envoy at Washington remained convinced that the United States would seek to annex only a portion of the Philippines.²¹ On October 16, 1898 King Leopold had delivered an address at Antwerp which stands as a sort of eulogy for imperialism. Having expressed satisfaction with his own work as administrator of the Congo, he spoke openly of his rivalry with the other maritime powers in the realms of ship building, commerce, and industry. His hopes for even greater colonial expansion were noted by observers.²²

At the end of October, however, the Belgian legation at Washington noted a sharp reversal in the previous American attitude toward Filipino destiny. Maurice Joostens, the Belgian chargé d'affaires, during the temporary absence of Count Lichtervelde from Washington, alerted his government to that shift. Joostens was most impressed by an almost universal demand in the United States press for complete annexation of the Philippines. He also repeated the rumor that President McKinley had been converted to annexation by a recently completed tour of the western states.²³

In the age of cable and telegraph, however, it is scarcely likely that the Belgians needed diplomatic dispatches from their envoys abroad to learn of shifts affecting their policy. The King of the Belgians,

¹⁹ Lichtervelde to Favereau, October 1, 6, 1898, Nos. 252, 278, Belge, A. E. Microcopy T125, Roll 6.

²⁰ Same to same, October 6, 1898, No. 278, New York, *ibid.*

²¹ Chargé d'affaires Maurice Joostens to Favereau, No. 12, Washington, Belge, A. E., Microcopy T1113, LM43, Roll 12.

²² Storer to Hay, October 22, 1898, No. 153, Brussels, U.S.N.A., Microcopy M193, Roll T34.

²³ Joostens to Favereau, No. 12, Washington, Belge, A. E., Microcopy T1113, LM43, Roll 12. There is not much doubt that the enthusiasm of the crowds addressed by McKinley while on his way to and from the Omaha Exposition, between October 10 and 22, merely confirmed what the president had already determined. Nevertheless, it was not until October 26 that he ordered John Hay to telegraph the Paris peace commissioners, instructing them to demand cession of all the Philippines. See James F. Rhodes, *The McKinley and Roosevelt Administrations, 1897-1909* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1965), pp. 102-103.

whose interest in the Philippines was personal and direct, opened conversations with the Spanish government concerning the future of the islands. It apparently was less painful to Spanish pride to surrender their Asian commonwealth to Belgium than to the parvenu Yankees.²⁴ King Leopold then approached the Washington cabinet, unofficially and without involving the Belgian foreign ministry directly, through Bellamy Storer, the United States Minister at Brussels. Storer's surprise was scarcely concealed behind the impersonal language of the ciphered cablegram he dispatched to Washington immediately.

Confidential. The King of the Belgians has just sent a confidential legal advisor with letter requesting that I cable the President of the United States that Spanish Government is willing to cede to a neutral, meaning the King of the Belgians, the whole Philippine Islands with the object of securing a civilized stable form of government with trade open to all the world equally as in case of Congo but it will not make the proposition unless fully assured will be accepted in whole or in part by the Government of the United States. . . .²⁵

Storer's cable was received at the State Department at 12:20 P.M. on November 9.²⁶ The proposal was unceremoniously dismissed on the next day in a ciphered cablegram: "Your despatch as to Philippine Islands received. Such a proposition would not be favorably considered by the Government of the United States." The minister at Brussels was left to his own devices to communicate his government's repulse of the king's proposal, as tactfully and as unofficially as possible.²⁷

Although King Leopold's pretensions to the government of the Philippines had been repulsed, the Belgian foreign ministry still harbored illusions that the United States might yet welcome a sort of shared administration of the islands. Even after the signing of the Peace of Paris on December 10, 1898, in which Spain agreed to sell the Philippines for twenty million dollars, there was some Belgian speculation that anti-expansionist elements in the Senate might refuse ratification.²⁸

²⁴ Spanish diplomatic archives are rarely opened to scholarly research prior to the passage of a full century. The present writer has therefore been confined to the use of United States and Belgian correspondence.

²⁵ Storer to Hay, November 9, 1898, Unnumbered ciphered telegram, Brussels, U.S.N.A., Microcopy M193, Roll T34. A copy of the cable was sent to President McKinley immediately. Storer also took responsibility for sending a copy to Judge William R. Day who had preceded Hay as Secretary of State, and who was currently serving as head of the United States treaty negotiators at Paris (*ibid.*). Judge Day called the Belgian-Spanish proposal to the attention of his colleagues, but they dismissed it as an attempt by a bankrupt Spain to dispose of her property before settling with her creditors. See Whitelaw Reid's Diary, November 10, 1898, Morgan, p. 145.

²⁶ Storer to Hay, November 9, 1898, telegram, Brussels, U.S.N.A., Microcopy M193, Roll T34.

²⁷ Hay to Storer, November 10, 1898, ciphered cable, Washington, U.S.N.A., Microcopy 77, Roll 21.

²⁸ The Senate did, in fact, ratify the treaty on February 6, 1899.

Consequently, the Belgian foreign ministry continued to urge Lichtervelde to explore any paths which might lead to a Belgian share in the administration of the Philippines. The Belgians continued to regard the support of American Roman Catholic prelates as their surest auxiliary to that end, if the Brussels cabinet was to be spared the humiliation of having its proposals rejected at an official level. Consequently, the arrival at Washington of Belgium's consul at Manila was warmly anticipated and welcomed by Count Lichtervelde.²⁹

Before leaving the Philippines, Edouard André had paid a parting visit to Monsignor Bernardino de Nozaleda, the Archbishop of Manila. As André informed the archbishop that he would return to Europe via a transcontinental railroad journey across the United States, Nozaleda offered the consul a letter of introduction to James, Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore.³⁰ As André took care to inform Favereau of his plans, including his intention of visiting Cardinal Gibbons, fresh instructions were sent to Count Lichtervelde which involved the use of André's services while he was in Washington.³¹

Primarily, this consisted of André visiting the cardinal as soon as he arrived in the capital. Unlike the earlier talks between Lichtervelde and Archbishop Ireland, André's conversations were to be concerned with convincing the cardinal to use his good offices to persuade the Holy See to appoint Belgians to the Filipino ecclesiastical hierarchy. To that end, André submitted lengthy memorials attesting to the low quality of the native clergy. He informed his superiors that the cardinal had been receptive to his ideas and that he had urged him to forward the information to Rome.

Cardinal Gibbons also offered to discuss the administration of the Philippine church with President McKinley and promised that he would forward the information on the condition of the island clergy to Rome. The cardinal was understandably reserved about any commitment to support André's thesis, namely, that a Belgian clergy and hierarchy could more effectively gain acceptance among native Filipino Roman Catholics than could citizens of the United States.³²

²⁹ Favereau to Lichtervelde, January 11, 1899, No. 252, Confidential, Brussels, Belge, A.E., Microcopy T1113, LM43, Roll 15; André to Favereau, February 22, 1899, Washington, Belge, A.E., Microcopy T125, Roll 6.

³⁰ André to Lichtervelde, February 27, 1899, Private, Washington, Belge, A.E., Microcopy T125, Roll 6.

³¹ André to Favereau, February 22, 1899, Washington, *ibid.* While André was crossing the United States by railroad, he was accompanied by three Americans who did not reveal that they were newspaper reporters until they reached Chicago. André claimed that his only mission was private business at Brussels. As André was a minor celebrity, thanks to his role at the siege of Manila, his journey to Brussels via Washington did earn some attention in the press (*ibid.*).

³² Lichtervelde to Favereau, February 28, 1899, Confidential, Washington, *ibid.* For serious recent studies of the Filipino church, see P.S. de Achutegui and Miguel A. Bernad, *Religious Revolution in the Philippines: The Life and Church of Gregorio Aglipay, 1860-1960* (2 vols., Manila: Ateneo de Manila, 1960); Gerald

The cardinal was as good as his word in that he addressed a note to Archbishop Sebastian Martinelli, who had been stationed in Washington since 1896 as Apostolic Delegate to the United States. With it he enclosed the lengthy documents in which André had described the flight of the Spanish clergy from the Philippines, the alleged moral inadequacy of the native clergy, and the wisdom of installing a Belgian leadership for the church in the islands. The Apostolic Delegate's reply, through his secretary, sounded the death knell of Belgian illusions:

I return the letter which you sent a few days ago for the Most Rev. Delegate's inspection. He desires to thank His Eminence for his courtesy in sending it to him, and says that he is glad to have from an outside source the information which it contains. He is not, however, in a position to make any practical use of it, since he is not being and never has been consulted by Rome on matters pertaining to the changes likely to be required in the territory lately subtracted from Spanish dominion.³³

After the final ratification of the peace treaty, Belgium would surely have abandoned her Filipino projects, even if they had enjoyed more support from Americans than they had, in fact, received. By the end of 1899, Lichtervelde was writing lengthy strictures to his superiors advising them that the best hope for the advancement of Belgian interests in the Philippines lay in complete avoidance of even the appearance of intrusion into United States policy there. Even André, happily returned from Brussels, where he had succeeded in chartering and raising capital for a new *Compagnie Générale des Philippines* was reconciled to the dominant role of United States citizens in the political and ecclesiastical life of the islands.³⁴ Almost three quarters of a century after the Spanish-American War, the ambitions of King Leopold II's Belgium seem naive or inane. In 1898, however, the *mission civilisatrice* of the white race was taken as an article of western political and religious faith. In that light, the brief Belgian interest in a Filipino protectorate deserves to be recorded.

H. Anderson (ed.), *Studies in Philippine Church History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).

³³ F. Rooker to Rev. Father O'Brien, March 8, 1899, Gibbons Papers. Cardinal Gibbons continued to interest himself in the affairs of the Philippines, as Catholic primate of the United States. In 1901 he journeyed to Rome, in the company of Archbishop Nozaleda of Manila, to discuss church affairs, in the islands, with Pope Leo XIII (John Tracy Ellis, Manuscript copy of *Life of Cardinal Gibbons*, Gibbons Papers). Gibbons continued to enjoy a warm relationship with the sovereigns of Belgium as long as he lived. In addition to annual Christmas letters, sent and received, a letter thanking the cardinal for his consistent defense of Leopold II's Congo policy is revealing (Leopold II to Cardinal Gibbons, January 15, 1905, Laeken, Royal Letters, Gibbons Papers).

³⁴ Lichtervelde to Favereau, November 14, 1899, No. 269, Washington, Belge, A.E., Microcopy T1113, LM43, Roll 15.