

Dear Mr. Secretary:-

In 1899 and 1900 Alexis E. Frye was Superintendent of Public Instruction in Cuba, and during his administration 1800 Cuban teachers were brought in Government Transports from Cuba to Cambridge, where they spent six weeks studying English and other things. Mr. Frye accompanied this expedition, and lived in my house. I had previously known him as the inventor and author of a new kind of school geography, which was a distinct improvement on preceding geographies. His geographies had then made him independent as regards money, and they still yield him a large income. He is therefore pecuniarily independent. He is an impulsive, quick-tempered man, possessing a remarkable confidence in his own judgment and powers of observation, but he is distinctly an altruistic enthusiast, prepared at any time to work hard in the interests of other people, if he can serve them in his own way. His temperament was absolutely incompatible with the temperament of General Wood. They fell out repeatedly, and finally Frye resigned his place and left Cuba. He had greatly commended himself to the Cuban people, and particularly to a large body of Cuban teachers.

Soon after he married an attractive and refined Cuban girl much younger than himself. Three or four children have been born to them, of whom at least two have died in infancy. The wife was insane for several months while the family was living in Cambridge, but she recovered on a ranch in California, to which the family retired.

About two months ago I received a long letter from Mr. Frye saying that he had been making a quiet journey through Cuba, and was

much disheartened by what he saw there. He stated, however, in a hopeful way, his view of the real situation and his remedy for it. The chief cause of the lack of self-governing power in the population he believes to be the fact that the great mass of the Cubans cannot read. He has talked with many officers of the old insurgents, both white and colored, many leaders of the Liberal Party, and with the leader of the new Conservative Party, and without a single exception these men have told him that, so long as the masses of the laborers in Cuba cannot read, any persuasive talker with an ambition for office can start an insurrection in Cuba. Mr. Frye has spent much time on sugar plantations, tobacco farms, and cattle ranges in Cuba. He says the men are naturally peaceable and well meaning - but they know nothing of the affairs of their own country, or of any other. Perhaps one in ten (in the country) can read a little; their homes are without books or newspapers. In general they are superstitious and credulous. In this condition their minds are rich fields for the seeds of discontent and sedition sowed by any agitator who believes that by making trouble for the government he can win a lucrative and easy position. Under these conditions no thoughtful Cuban, or American in Cuba, believes that the Cuban Republic can stand alone. Almost all intelligent Cubans believe that insurrection is to be made the weapon to compel an American control.

Mr. Frye's plan - for he has a plan to remedy this condition of things - is to organize a new branch of public instruction for adults - for men only. He would organize night or evening schools for adults, not only in the towns and cities, but on the sugar plantations, the tobacco "vegas", and in the villages of the grazing districts, placing these schools under the existing Secretary of Public Instruction and the existing Boards of

Education, but providing a separate Superintendent of Schools for Adults. Let the money and supplies needed go through the same channels as in the present organization for children. Teach nothing in these evening schools except reading and writing; and admit to the schools youths and men between the ages of sixteen and forty-five. In the rural districts use the same schoolrooms which are used in the day-time for children; provide a different set of teachers for the evening classes, paying them perhaps two-thirds as much as the regular wages of the day teachers in the same district. Let the evening schools hold six sessions a week, but group the pupils in classes so that each pupil will attend either two or three sessions a week, as local conditions may make advisable. Provide books for the reading classes which will deal with the effects of war in Europe, Cuba, Central America, and South America, bringing out clearly that war means temporary ruin, that the common soldier gains nothing, and risks wounds and disease for himself, and suffering for his family at home. Prepare also reading books dealing with the general laws relating to property, personal rights, police protection, and the conduct of domestic and foreign trade. The Superintendent's office should also publish once or twice a week leaflets expressed in language suitable for beginners in reading, and giving the news of the times, especially the Cuban news concerning agriculture, transportation and commerce. Reach all the districts of the country with these leaflets through the evening schools. Mr. Frye has calculated that the whole of this work - schools, publications, and all - could be done for two years for less than four millions of dollars, and he thinks the wise expenditure of this money would in less than that time make insurrection impossible among the present generation of laborers; for the future he would rely upon the Cuban children who have been instructed in the public and private schools of the Island.

Mr. Frye is desperately in earnest about this plan, and he has written to me that he would abandon his present work - he is writing some new school books - and his extensive orange groves in California, and would devote two years to this cause in Cuba, moving his wife and child thither. He would serve as Superintendent of evening schools without salary, and would undertake to produce the necessary books and leaflets (of course with suitable aid) with great dispatch. He does not know where the money is to come from; but he does feel sure that this would be by far the cheapest way of securing for Cuba a stable government.

Since I have never been in Cuba, I feel myself entirely incompetent to judge whether Mr. Frye's plan has merit, and whether it is feasible or not. I submit it to your judgment with only this remark, that the plan seems to strike in a statesmanlike way at the roots of the Cuban difficulty.

A month after Mr. Frye wrote to me about this plan of his, he wrote to me again saying that Mrs. Frye's aged father died last March in Havana just at the time when the Fries lost an infant boy. Thereupon, Mr. Frye went to Cuba to bring his wife's sister to his California home, but when the sister reached California, she was insane; whereupon Mrs. Frye relapsed into the same condition. Mr. Frye thinks, however, that she is much less ill than she was in Cambridge four or five years ago, and he expects her to recover shortly. Mr. Frye says that under these circumstances he could not go at once to Cuba as he had suggested in his former letter to me. He would, however, be glad to cooperate, even under his present trying circumstances, with the new Superintendent in any way, as, for instance, in the preparation of the needed books and leaflets, or later by going to Cuba as a teacher himself. He firmly believes that his plan should be set on foot at once, and

Highland, California, June 2, 1907.

President Charles W. Eliot,

again urges that this is the only way to make insurrection impossible, or at least highly improbable, in Cuba.

I said on the first page of this long letter that Mr. Frye is an altruistic enthusiast. He is certainly that; but he is also a man capable of a great deal of hard work, though not patient of a monotonous routine of labor. He has also in his composition, I think, a streak of genius. The undertaking which he would like to direct, or cooperate in, would certainly be a novel one. It would depend for success on the existence of a wide desire among the illiterate Cubans to learn to read. Mr. Frye believes that nearly all of them - including the negroes who do most of the fighting - feel that desire, and feel it strongly.

If Mr. Frye's suggestion excites some interest in your mind, you will perhaps bring it to the attention of the President. Faithfully yours,
C. W. E.

Hon. William H. Taft

Secretary of War