

America's Traditional Isolation

EUROPEANS are frequently asked by their American friends what they as impartial observers think of the position towards the Old World into which the United States has been brought by the events of the last half century, and in particular how far the United States can now be guided by the counsels which Washington gave in his farewell address, counsels recommending a policy of complete detachment from and non-intervention in the political affairs of Europe. This question has so often been addressed to me as having lived for some time in America and studied American history that I have been led to put together in a very brief form some of the considerations which seem to bear upon it. They are the fruits of a reflection which began long before the outbreak of the present war and they are written down, it need hardly be said, with no intent to express an opinion on the course the United States ought to follow in any particular conjuncture, but only to suggest some general principles which would, supposing them to be sound, be applicable irrespective of any such particular conjuncture.

Washington's Address was recognized in his own time, and has been recognized ever since, as a masterly document. No single utterance by any American statesman has had more influence, perhaps none has had so much influence, upon the mind of the American people. The advice it contained was wise advice, eminently suitable to the moment and for long afterwards. It was followed by his earlier successors to the great benefit of the young republic; it was the parent or foreshadowing of that declaration of policy in which John Quincy Adams and the English George Canning agreed, and which was delivered by President Monroe. It outlined a course of action which the United States could then safely follow and which, one may say, was prescribed both by its circumstances and by the circumstances of contemporary Europe.

Consider what those circumstances were. In Washington's day North America was distant from Europe by a voyage of some weeks, often of many weeks, and often perilous. American commerce with Europe was already important, but how small compared with that of our times! Very few persons went to and fro. News came slowly and what did come became imperfectly known to the American people. They could afford to think little and care little about Europe, not only because their relations, personal and commercial, were comparatively slender but also because they were then and

for two generations afterwards mainly occupied in colonizing their vast western territory and developing their own resources. They were moreover in Washington's day a population of only five millions.

And what were the circumstances of Europe from Washington's day until the middle of the last century? The great Powers of the European continent were involved in a conflict of dynastic interests in which all the Powers showed themselves equally selfish and equally hostile to the principles of liberty. They had little to do with the United States except for that short period in which the Holy Alliance threatened an interference with the efforts for independence of the Spanish American colonies, an interference averted by the efforts of the United States and of Great Britain. The United States could well think in those days that it had little to do with European complications, and the less to do the better.

But at last things changed in Europe and the revolutions of 1848 marked a decisive stage in the change. They have gone on changing fast since then, and the greatest change of all has been the extension of the power and influence of the leading civilized states beyond the boundaries of Europe; the whole world has now become one by the enormous development of trade, due to new and swift means of transportation and communication, and by the interests which every country has in the weal or woe of every other country. Not only the directly commercial, but the financial relations of all civilized countries are closely interwoven; wars affect the trade and the welfare generally of neutrals more than ever before; capital has become so great a power, and capital in one country is so interlocked with capital in another, that whatever affects it anywhere affects it everywhere. No country escapes this influence and the United States can escape it as little as any because it is the wealthiest of all.

Moreover, the range of offensive warlike action has been immensely enlarged; every state has now become the neighbor of every other for evil as well as for good. Were an aggressive and ambitious military and naval Power, restrained by no scruples, disposed to embark on a policy of conquest overseas at the expense of weaker nations, she could do now what would have been impossible in the days of Washington. We in England used till lately to set down as mere "pipe dreams" the fears that such an aggressive European Power would threaten such countries as Brazil or Argentina, but we must

now confess ourselves mistaken. Neither of those countries nor the islands of the West Indies would be safe from attack were the other Powers which possess navies, and would be interested in checking aggression, unable to intervene. Supposing their navies got out of the way, the field would be clear.

Thirdly, European wars have now almost lost their old dynastic character. Austria is an exception, for there the Hapsburgs are still allowed to play their own hand, but the Austro-Hungarian monarchy—an ill-assorted congeries of races, only one of which is attached to the dynasty and some of which dislike it—is an anachronism in the modern world. Wars are now undertaken partly for colonies and commerce, but mainly for the sake of nationality and liberty. This war has arisen from a quarrel over nationality, but it involves the principle of liberty also, because everyone knows that if Germany had been a free country in the sense in which France and Italy, Switzerland and Holland are free, there need have been no conflict. The course which the war has taken has involved not only the principle of liberty but the maintenance of international right, the observance of rules laid down by international conventions, and the principles of humanity towards non-combatants, and these principles interest all the world, the two Americas no whit less than Europe. They, too, have a stake in the struggle.

Fourthly, never before has the power of public opinion in neutral nations been so fully recognized as it is in this war. Each of the belligerents has shown itself anxious to win the favor of that opinion, recognizing its moral influence as well as the possibilities of its direct action. Thoughtful men in every neutral nation feel that the results of the war must affect for good or evil their own moral standard and their own political development. This is a proof of how near to one another are the old and the new world of to-day.

Lastly, there is another way in which the position of the United States has been entirely changed. She now numbers more than twenty times the population of Washington's day. She has become a great Power to which the world looks as the strongest and most impartial exponent of neutral opinion. The United States stands in an especial degree for the principles of international justice and international law. It has done more than any other nation to advocate the substitution of arbitration for war, and to improve the rules and assert the value of the principles of public law as governing international relations. Less than ever before can the United States view with an indifferent eye the conflict, wherever in the world it may be waged, for principles which it has done so much to promote, principles intertwined with its own life and growth.

Its greatness and its history alike impose on it a unique responsibility. Were Washington alive now would he not recognize such a responsibility? He certainly could no longer say in the words of his message, "Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none or a very remote relation." This brings me back to the point where we started. Have not the changes of one hundred and twenty years so altered the relations of North America to Europe as to make some lines of action right or even necessary now which would have been uncalled for, and even dangerous, in 1796? These are submitted as general considerations. Of their applicability to the present or any other specific crisis it is not for me to speak. No sensible man on this side of the Atlantic would venture to offer argument or advice upon matters which are entirely for the judgment of the government and people of the United States. The more anyone knows of the conditions under which the Executive and Congress have to act, and the complicated facts they have to weigh, the less would he presume to offer advice.

But there is one point on which a word may be said, because it relates not to the present conjuncture or to that treaty settlement when the war ends which the belligerent Powers, whoever they may then be, will have to make, but to the further and subsequent question: what is to be done after the settlement has been reached and completed? This is a matter on which Europeans are entitled to address their American friends, inviting their co-operation in a work to be done hereafter for the benefit of the world. All thoughtful men both in Britain, and, as we are told, in the United States, also feel that some effort must be made to provide machinery calculated to prevent the recurrence of such a frightful calamity as this war has proved to be. The difficulties of such a scheme are obvious. But they need not be insuperable, with the coöperation of the United States, which would bring to any concerted plan for the amicable settlement of disputes and for the maintenance of peace by a League to restrain aggression, its authority, its strength, and that disinterestedness which belongs to its position outside the circle of European jealousies. Here is an undertaking which the changes of the last seventy years have made a matter of common concern to every part of the world. No great nation, whatever its maxims of policy have heretofore been, can, if it approves the end in view, stand aloof from the effort to attain that end, now more than ever urgent. Here is a service in which the United States is called upon to join because it is to be rendered to mankind at large, to the New World as well as to the Old.

JAMES BRYCE.

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The Future of Mr. Lloyd George

IT is strange that the Catholic Church, casting about for forms of penance, never thought of using the portrait painter's art. An order of painting friars, whose skill could reveal the mind in the face, would have exerted a terrible power upon a sensitive penitent. Conceive a closet hung with sketches taken in youth, in middle life and in old age by the same merciless hand, in which would stand revealed the soul's wear under the friction of time.

The most brilliant and the most pitiless of English draftsmen painted the other day for the Red Cross a portrait of Mr. Lloyd George. The foible of Mr. Augustus John is not veneration, and in this vivid but cruel work the man is drawn as few of us venture to see him. One rarely sees a face quite as it is. Memory brings its colorings, and man's record shapes insensibly for us the expression of his features. The clearest memory that exists for me of Mr. Lloyd George is of the man as he was some sixteen years ago, mid-way in the Boer War. The face was younger and smoother and less scarred by the world. It wore a daring look of challenge, and the eyes had still something of the poet's vision, who sees a distant horizon. In those days, with no thought of self and no anxious heed for his career, he braved a nation at war, and with an eloquence that counted no consequences, denounced the greedy and oppressive policy which was erasing from the list of free peoples the names of two little republics. It is another man whom Mr. John has seen. The world has built its walls about him. The vision of distant things and high ideals is gone from the eyes. The features have lost that suggestion of spiritual beauty. It is the face of a politician, busied in the chancy pursuit of success, absorbed in the struggle with other wills, and bent by its habitual thoughts into a look that has more in it of calculation than of chivalrous defiance. It makes above all an impression of restlessness. It is uneasy, insecure, alert, the face of a man who is for ever scheming, who gambles with his own career and stakes his all upon success. The lifted brow is watching for some stealthy movement of an opponent, and the lips, twisting the gray moustache, hold back the nervous impulse to an instant retort. The idealist and knight-errant of sixteen years ago has become the engineer of political crises, the artist of coalition, the blender of parties and opinions, the opportunist, the manipulator.

Whatever the future of Mr. Lloyd George may be, he will remain a Celt. His originality, his success and also his failure, come back to this, that he

brings into English affairs a temperament provokingly alien, in its daring and in its grace. He is never quite like anyone else, and in any party he wears its colors with a difference. When English Liberals fought the Boer War, they used to speak more in sorrow than in anger, heavily, with a lament for the evil times. His rage was quick, inspiring, impenitent, and when he struck, his lithe frame danced with the joy of battle. Other men fought the House of Lords, and even Mr. Asquith hurled ponderous phrases at them. But who else enjoyed fighting them? He was an artist in his vituperation, and his phrases were not so much missiles hurled at an enemy as postures in which he revealed himself with delight.

There is an English tradition in oratory, based on classical models, and redolent of Latin prose. You still may hear it, though rarely in this generation, in the more studied utterances of Mr. Asquith in his Ciceronian vein, or of Mr. Churchill, when he recollects his ancient descent. To that style Mr. Lloyd George makes no pretensions. His form is simple, colloquial, familiar. But he plays on a chord of sentiment which the English orator, trained in a public school with its red-Indian tradition of a speechless reserve, is ashamed to touch. The same speech will sink into sheer vulgarity, and then rise to a pure note of poetry, a ringing appeal to sentiment which reveals the Welsh bard beneath the British politician.

In his handling of men and movements the secret of the man is an un-English grace and charm. There is no group or section but has at some period accused him of betrayal. There is none which he has not on occasion disappointed and misled. They behaved, with the single exception of the suffragists, as though the process were rather agreeable than otherwise. I have often watched Greeks manipulating Turkish governors and soldiers with a like skill, and I came to the conclusion that provided a Greek could keep a Turk flattered and amused, he did not mind being "done." This art is rarely developed by ruling races, and in this as in so much else, Mr. George is the Celt. The ruling race perceives the obliquity, but it enjoys the exhibition of grace.

A man of this mercurial temperament without systematic training or discipline, no reader, no student, avid of immediate success, alive in every nerve and living in the movement, impulsive, intensely personal and undisguisedly vain, will be guided in his political career by the two arts of which he is the master. By them he must succeed. He will choose his opinions as a prima donna chooses her rôles. Some suit his style and others do not. The orator must speak to the masses, and lead a popular party, for he speaks the mother-tongue of the democracy.