

## Have We Bonds with the British?

QUINCY HOWE

LIVINGSTON HARTLEY'S article, *Our Bonds with the British* in the Spring, 1938, issue of *The North American Review* establishes a happy precedent in the literature of Anglo-American apologetics. Its author is the first man within living memory to avoid false sentiment and hypocrisy while advocating closer ties between the two great English-speaking nations. Unlike such dreamers as Nicholas Murray Butler, Thomas W. Lamont, James T. Shotwell, and Walter Lippmann, Mr. Hartley devotes primary attention to the material advantages to be derived from Anglo-American understanding.

About a year ago I embarked on a different task and tried to smoke out the conventional Anglophiles by insulting them as roundly as I knew how. Under the flip title of *England Expects Every American To Do His Duty* I wrote a book whose chief purpose was to remove the discussion from the atmosphere that infests an English-Speaking Union dinner. Whether my book encouraged Mr. Hartley to write his article I do not know; I do know that his article prompts me to substitute reason for invective and to bring the issues up to date.

The tone of Mr. Hartley's article and his former post in the State department make him a frank if not an official spokesman for the real aims of President Roosevelt's foreign policy. Mr. Hartley does not deny that the Roosevelt policy is essentially pro-British; indeed he rather glories in it for that reason. He also argues the case for a pro-British American foreign policy on logical and practical grounds.

"The high-ceilinged rooms of the State department,"

he says in his opening paragraph, "contain very few officials who do not believe that a stronger Britain will benefit the national interests of the United States." Agreed—at least for the purpose of this discussion. But in the light of recent events what hope is there for this "stronger Britain" that Mr. Hartley and the officials of the State department desire?

When President Roosevelt delivered his famous Chicago speech calling for a quarantine of aggressors, the entire Anglo-American cheering section applauded. Alfred M. Landon and Henry L. Stimson, the *New York Times* and Secretary Hull rallied behind the President. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden agreed that it was "a clarion call." But neither Chamberlain nor Eden showed themselves willing to follow up the President's appeal with a strong policy along the lines he had defined. At the Brussels Conference Mr. Eden confined himself to the emptiest kind of generalities and within a few months Mr. Chamberlain was trying to dicker with the very aggressors whom Mr. Roosevelt invited him to quarantine.

Those Americans who had praised the Chicago speech thereupon attacked Mr. Chamberlain's hypocrisy and cowardice. Having been accused of extreme anti-British bias I am amused to find my accusers turning on Mr. Chamberlain far more savagely than I have ever turned upon any Englishman. I can therefore only repeat in connection with the present British Prime Minister precisely the same point I made in connection with his predecessor whose foreign policy Mr. Chamberlain is continuing intact. That point has nothing to do with democracy, collective security, or quarantining aggressors. It is that any British statesman, whether his name be Baldwin, Chamberlain, or Eden, is defending a lost cause.

It is true that Mr. Eden parted company with Mr. Chamberlain in February, 1938, when the latter refused to stand up to either of the two Fascist dictators. But until Mr. Eden resigned from the Cabinet he had followed exactly the same conciliatory line that Mr. Chamberlain still pursues in the face of repeated acts of Fascist aggression. Mr. Eden refused to apply oil sanctions against Italy or to close the Suez canal to Italian troop and supply ships in 1936. He supported the hypocritical Non-Intervention Committee in Spain because, in his own words, he again preferred "peace at almost any price."

With this policy I have no quarrel; I simply point out that it is the policy of the lesser evil which becomes, in time, the policy of the greater evil. In 1931, for example, the British Foreign Office gave its tacit support to Japan's invasion of Manchuria. This did not mean that the British welcomed the prospect of a greater Japan dominating eastern Asia; it simply meant that at the time a Japanese conquest of Manchuria seemed to be the only practical alternative to the extension of communism in China. The Nanking government had launched campaign after campaign against the communist armies of China and was so absorbed in its efforts to stamp out revolution that it had no strength and little desire to give battle to Japan. Chiang Kai-shek himself regarded the Japanese invaders as a lesser evil than those of his own fellow-countrymen who had embraced communism.

Time marched on. The Japanese not only conquered Manchuria, they swallowed Jehol Province as well. Chiang Kai-shek and the Communists began to weary of their long warfare and drew together in defense of their common fatherland. In November, 1934, General Smuts, the most important single spokesman of British imperial policy, told the Royal Institute of International Affairs

in London that Japan had become the chief threat to British imperial interests in Asia. By 1937 the Chinese Communists forgot that they had once called Chiang Kai-shek "the running-dog of foreign imperialism" and he, in turn, was persuaded by a kidnapping party to take a stronger line toward Japan and to accept communist support. And since the outbreak of large-scale hostilities in China, the British have tended to favor the Chinese armies, Communists and all, against Japan. Whether this support will continue remains, of course, to be seen.

The same pattern repeated itself in Ethiopia and Spain. The British National Government never welcomed the prospect of Italian expansion in Africa or Spain, in the eastern or the western Mediterranean. But it relished even less the prospect of a black colonial people defeating a white imperialist power or the triumph of the Spanish Socialists, Communists, and Syndicalists at the expense of General Franco's Fascists. Therefore the British Foreign Office threw its reluctant support to the lesser evil of Fascist aggression.

Just as General Smuts in 1934 urged the British to withdraw their support from Japan in Asia, so Anthony Eden in 1938 urged his fellow cabinet officers to stop favoring Hitler and Mussolini in Europe. But Neville Chamberlain saw an even greater evil than the Fascist International. He feared that the Eden line would lead to immediate war.

Now it happens to be my personal conviction that events will prove Mr. Eden right and Mr. Chamberlain wrong, or perhaps I should say that the Chamberlain line will have to be discarded in favor of Mr. Eden's at some future time. But that is not the question here. The point at issue is whether Mr. Chamberlain or Mr. Eden

or anyone else can maintain British rule intact over one quarter of the earth's surface. Lord Halifax has certainly undergone a disappointing experience with Mr. Hitler and one not calculated to add to British prestige or British self-confidence. The experience began with the Berchtesgaden conversations. It continued when Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop visited London. It terminated when Hitler rudely took over Austria in the middle of von Ribbentrop's London sojourn. Lord Halifax's comment on the Austrian coup sums up the official British attitude. "Horrible, horrible," he moaned, holding his head in his hands as he paced the floor of the Foreign Office, "I never thought they'd do it."

But what would have been the alternative to the Chamberlain-Halifax policy? Perhaps it is true, as the supporters of collective security argue, that economic sanctions would bring Hitler and Mussolini tumbling down — or at least bring them to terms without war. Perhaps it is also true, as the military men argue, that any general war would quickly annihilate the German-Italian-Japanese combination. But Eden's policy does not totally exclude the possibility of war and even a short victorious war by no means guarantees the integrity of the British Empire. For behind Chamberlain's policy lies not only the fear of immediate war; there also lies the fear that if Britain becomes involved in any general war, however brief and however one-sided, the Empire as it exists today will be doomed.

The weakest and most disturbing feature of Mr. Hartley's case and of a great many highly-placed Americans (not to mention Britishers) who think as he does is their failure even to consider the possibility that perhaps there simply is not any policy at all that can preserve the British Empire intact. All the pleas for American

support for Great Britain are surrounded by a veritable conspiracy of silence on the subject of whether or not the British Empire can be successfully defended. Just drop the hint to any loyal British subject — whether he happens to travel on a British or an American passport is an unimportant detail — that perhaps the British Empire is doomed beyond recall and you will be greeted by a storm of abuse, spluttering futility, or humorous evasion. And Mr. Hartley runs true to form in refusing to consider even as a remote possibility the idea that the closest kind of Anglo-American alliance may not be able to save the Empire.

Perhaps it is in order to cover up this evasion that Mr. Hartley cannot resist a brief reference to our “intangible bonds” with the British. Well, if Britain sinks into the sea we shall still have the work of Shakespeare and Milton; we shall lose only J. B. Priestley and Sir Hugh Walpole unless, as is more than likely, they are lecturing in the United States when the Empire goes under. As for the “tangible” bonds of trade and investments Mr. Hartley indulges in some very fancy mathematics. Over forty per cent of our exports go to the British Empire, he reminds us, while our imports from British-owned territories amount to more than one third of everything we buy from abroad. This sounds impressive until we remember another figure that Mr. Hartley conveniently forgets: ninety per cent of our trade is domestic. In other words Mr. Hartley is subordinating our whole foreign policy to less than five per cent of our total volume of business. Furthermore, Britain’s physical dependence on many American commodities and factory products will continue whatever foreign policy we may pursue. We do not have to sign one of Mr. Hull’s reciprocal treaties in order to keep most of this five per cent of our total trade.

Mr. Hartley uses the same mathematical trick in discussing our investments in the British Empire. His total figure of \$2,700,000,000 sounds like a lot of money; it is thirty-six per cent, he says, of our "world total." But this "world total" amounts to less than half of one per cent of our total national wealth which is estimated at three hundred and fifty billions. Again, as in the case of foreign trade, our foreign investments would not seem to deserve quite the importance that Mr. Hartley attaches to them nor would we automatically lose all these investments and all this trade if the cardinal aim of our foreign policy were not to underwrite the British Empire.

Furthermore, in discussing this Empire Mr. Hartley juggles words as conveniently as he juggles figures. He speaks of the affinity between the self-governing British Dominions and the United States. But suddenly the British Dominions (consisting of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa with a total population of twenty-four millions, chiefly whites) become the British Empire with a total population of over four hundred millions, chiefly colored. Perhaps the United States has much in common with the British Dominions, but this is not what Mr. Hartley says when he refers to America's "kinship of view with the *British Empire* on foreign affairs." (My italics.)

Scratch an American Anglophile and you get an American imperialist. As Mr. Hartley warms to his theme he argues that "the larger interests of the United States and the British Empire are parallel in Eastern Asia." These "larger interests" he never defines; certainly they cannot be America's infinitesimal trade with China or its tiny stake in Far Eastern investments. If "larger interests" appeal to Mr. Hartley he would do better to urge closer relations with Japan.

When Mr. Hartley discusses the "parallel position" of the United States and Great Britain in respect to peace he loses all touch with the real world. "Both the United States and the British Empire are 'status quo' powers." The British Empire, covering as it does one quarter of the earth's surface and ruling over one quarter of the earth's inhabitants, obviously stands to lose by almost any alteration in the existing order almost anywhere on earth. The United States covers less ground and can therefore regard with indifference many changes that affect Britain vitally.

It is true that in pursuance of the policy of the lesser evil and in line with its determination to avoid war at almost any price the British Foreign Office has done nothing to prevent changes in the status quo as far as Manchuria, Ethiopia, Spain, and Austria are concerned. But the changes it has been powerless to stop in those quarters have put the nations that profited from them in a better position to challenge Britain's two really vital interests, interests for which the Foreign Office admits that Britain would have to fight. One of these is control of the sea-lanes leading to the British Isles; the other is resistance to hostile penetration of France and the Low Countries. In other words, if the naval status quo undergoes a change, especially in the northeastern Atlantic, or if the territorial status quo undergoes a change, especially in western Europe, Great Britain must go to war.

The United States also has vital interests which it would fight to protect, but these are not the same interests for which the British Empire would do battle. If Japan seized Hawaii, if Germany or Italy made one of the Latin American Republics a vassal state, if, under present conditions, the far-off Philippines were attacked,



the United States would be bound to resist. But such threats as these also affect British interests unfavorably and Britain would therefore show at least benevolent neutrality toward any action the United States might choose to take. In short, it is not necessary for the United States to pledge assistance to Great Britain in any and every part of the world and to launch another fatal war-time boom as it did between 1914 and 1917 in order to gain British support when some vital American interest is threatened.

In bracketing the United States and Great Britain as "status quo powers" Mr. Hartley implies that both countries have an almost equal interest in resisting almost any kind of change almost anywhere on earth. The British Empire, by virtue of its world-wide ramifications, cannot remain indifferent to events in any quarter of the globe and since it is sitting on top of the world it has nowhere to go but down. The position of the United States is entirely different. It is the fashion these days to speak of the "have" and "have-not" nations and on the basis of this classification the United States and the British Empire belong in the ranks of the "have" powers. But so, for that matter, does Switzerland and yet no one claims that simply because Switzerland has no territorial ambitions it must therefore fight to uphold the status quo in eastern Asia. In like manner, the United States has no territorial ambitions, but simply because it is a larger nation than Switzerland, Mr. Hartley and others assume that Americans should intervene in European struggles which have no more bearing on their interests than the warfare in China has upon the interests of the Swiss. In any event, before the United States enters into the universal partnership with Britain that Mr. Hartley suggests, let him or somebody else bring forward a clear-cut balance-sheet

showing exactly what material advantages the American people would stand to gain.

Until such a balance sheet makes its appearance there is but one construction that can be put upon the pleas of Mr. Hartley and other Anglophiles. The use of the words "status quo power" in connection with the United States provides the tip-off. Like a good many other countries in this disturbed century the United States faces not just another swing of the business cycle but a crisis of the system. The 1929 depression was the first depression in American history that sank to a lower level than the previous cyclical decline. The 1936-37 revival was the first revival that did not far exceed all previous periods of prosperity. One may assign the blame where one pleases but the fact remains that almost ten years after the crash of 1929 there are still more than ten million unemployed in the United States and the young people of the country — like the youth of Germany before (and after) Hitler — have not got a chance.

Three broad solutions present themselves. Two of them, Fascism and Socialism, are ruled out because no program, no leader, no organization exists to make either of them effective in the near future. Mr. Roosevelt has taken a few faltering steps along the "middle way" of social security, labor legislation, government operation of utilities, higher taxes, slum clearance, public works, but he has lagged far behind the British Tories — not to mention the Social Democrats of Scandinavia — in all these directions. Certainly no Fascist and at best a rather timid progressive, Mr. Roosevelt has chosen the only other possible solution.

It is the path of imperial expansion. Secretary Hull lays great store by foreign trade. The Big Navy program not only primes the pump; it serves notice on the world

at large that the Roosevelt administration seeks salvation abroad. The same "economic royalists" who attacked the President's Supreme Court measures and his Reorganization bill endorse his foreign policy to the hilt — the New York Times, Governor Landon, James P. Warburg (who wrote *Hell Bent for Election*, but voted for Roosevelt because he liked his foreign policy), former Secretary Stimson, Walter Lippmann, Dorothy Thompson, and so on down the line. The aim of all these good people is to uphold the status quo at home and abroad and to question whether the status quo can be successfully maintained anywhere on earth is to challenge so deep a conviction, so basic an interest as to make further discussion of the subject impossible.

Now I am not arguing that Roosevelt should adopt a more radical domestic or foreign policy. I am simply insisting that the conservative supporters of Mr. Roosevelt's foreign policy have completely closed their eyes to the urgency of the domestic situation. I have already indicated the blindness of our Anglophiles to the precarious condition of the British Empire. That we may be living in a century of revolution as well as a century of war does not seem to have occurred to them. Such events as the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Chinese Revolution of 1924–27, the Gandhi movement in India do not enter into their calculations of future possibilities.

They are equally blind to the changes that are going on under their noses in the United States. The supporters of Landon who are rallying around the Roosevelt foreign policy, almost to a man, completely misread the temper of the American people in November, 1936. ("I accept the verdict of the American people," wrote the ineffable Dorothy Thompson the day after election.) The British Tories, the arch representatives of reaction, have been

guilty of no such blindness and stupidity as our Liberty Leaguers. At least they recognize the nature of the crisis that confronts them and if one may speak, as M. André Maurois does, of "The Miracle of England," it is that the English ruling class still remains in the saddle twenty years after the Armistice of 1918. In view of the way most American conservatives have consistently misread both the foreign and the domestic situation the miracle of America is that they command any attention at all.

Mr. Hartley offers a typical rather than an extreme example of the wishful and fuzzy thinking of the American conservative. In recommending a virtual Anglo-American alliance he does not so much as pause to consider whether such an alliance can achieve its objectives. Then, in urging a stronger foreign policy upon the United States, it does not occur to him that any foreign policy the United States pursues perhaps has some faint connection with domestic conditions. When, therefore, he holds out to us as a serious possibility the vision of a world overrun by the Fascist International the suspicion arises that he has been reading the *Daily Worker* under the misapprehension that it was the *New York Times*, the chief difference between these two exponents of collective security being the greater susceptibility of the communist newspaper to British propaganda about the menace of Fascism.

Like the advocates of simon-pure collective security, Mr. Hartley brings his argument to a conclusion by depicting the German-Italian-Japanese combination taking over a world system that the British, with their far greater power and experience, are finding more and more difficult to dominate. I therefore rise to suggest that Mr. Hartley forget his apocalyptic dreams of Fascist world conquest long enough to read a volume entitled *If*

*War Comes* by R. Ernest Dupuy and George Fielding Eliot, both of them majors in the United States Army, and Major Eliot's article on Italy in the April 1938 issue of *Harper's*. He will discover not only that material factors make a program of Fascist world conquest the height of improbability; he may also perceive that the myth of German, Italian, and Japanese invincibility is sedulously fostered by British propagandists eager to persuade the United States to support the British Empire in the second World War. As Major Eliot observes, "They would like very much to have American aid. But they do not need us and there is no occasion for Americans to fight another European war to make the world safe for democracy."

Major Eliot bases his analysis on purely material factors: man-power, sea-power, supplies of raw materials, technical proficiency, geo-politics. If this economic and military analysis is extended to include social and political factors, the case against an Anglo-American imperialist crusade against the rival imperialist systems of Germany, Italy, and Japan becomes even stronger. We are witnessing today not a repetition of 1914, although the line-up of the various nations seems to be following the 1914 pattern. History does not repeat itself; it goes on where it left off. The first World War started with a battle for imperialist spoils and ended with a Red-hunt at the expense of Bolshevik Russia. The second World War (which has already begun) has some of the same imperialist objectives. That is to say, the Japanese hope to exploit Manchuria as the British have exploited China proper; Mussolini hopes to exploit Ethiopia as the French have exploited Morocco and Algeria. But the stakes in the imperialist game are dwindling. Before the war India imported seventy-five per cent of its cotton textiles from Great Britain and manufactured the remaining twenty-

five per cent domestically; today, Indian-owned cotton mills supply seventy-five per cent of India's needs. From 1900 to 1914 about half the new capital issues floated each year on the London money market went into foreign investments; since 1930 the corresponding figure has averaged about two per cent a year.

This economic revolution — for many “backward” countries are now going through the same industrial revolution that occurred in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries — has not only weakened the position of the British, French, Dutch, and other colonial empires; it has strengthened the nationalist middle class and the revolutionary working class in the colonial countries and enabled them to present more effective opposition to foreign rule. At the same time, the British, French, Dutch, and other “democratic” peoples have set up systems of taxation, social security, unemployment relief, government interference with private enterprise, cooperative and socialist experiments. The Fascist countries, on the other hand, unable to afford these luxuries, have reduced the middle and working classes more and more to a condition of slavery. I am not one of those who foresee a revolution in Germany or Italy tomorrow. I do, however, foresee Hitler and Mussolini preferring war to internal collapse and I doubt that anything short of war can bring either of them down. I also maintain that neither Hitler nor Mussolini can possibly wage a successful major war; in fact, it is the fear of what might follow the collapse of Hitler or Mussolini that accounts in large measure for the hesitation of the British ruling class to force a show-down with either of the Fascist dictators. Here is another illustration of the policy of the lesser evil.

I have only one quarrel with Mr. Hartley's version of the decline and fall of the British Empire. The Fascist

International is not the only threat to Great Britain and what Mr. Hartley and his British friends now represent as a crusade against the Fascist menace may presently become a crusade against the still greater menace of revolution inside the British Empire and inside the Fascist powers themselves. I am not pleading the case for revolution in Europe or Asia any more than I am pleading the case for Fascism. I am simply raising the question of whether the crusade against revolution on which Great Britain proposes that we embark (in the name of a crusade against Fascism) can be fought to a successful conclusion.

The removal of Anthony Eden suggests, of course, that the British National Government has abandoned all pretensions to democracy and may even have reached some secret understanding with Hitler and Mussolini. This is as it may be, but it seems far more logical to foresee an eventual stiffening of British resistance and the definite abandonment of the present policy of vacillation — especially if the United States can be persuaded to cooperate. Barkis (in the form of Secretary Hull) appears to be more than willing, but how and when the eventual consolidation of Anglo-American forces will occur no one can say at the moment.

Under the circumstances common prudence would seem to dictate that the United States adopt a strictly isolationist line since any cooperation could mean only one thing: support for the British imperial system. A time may come when we should support this system, at least in part, but when that time arrives our isolationist position will be our strongest bargaining point in any negotiations we may undertake with Great Britain or any other power. By adhering to isolation until we know exactly what kind of cooperation we are letting ourselves in for

we are at least protecting ourselves against enlisting — as President Roosevelt and Secretary Hull would have us do — in any and every crusade for any and every abstract principle such as respect for treaties, quarantining aggressors, preserving orderly processes.

Mr. Hartley modestly concludes with a note of skepticism and admits that there may be some doubt as to whether the United States should fight rather than let the British Empire go under. For my part I am only too glad to admit that the preservation of some parts of that Empire may become a matter of vital interest to the United States at some future time. But until that time comes, the present tendency of the State Department to enter into vague understandings with the British Foreign Office can lead only to the enlistment of the American people in behalf of a lost cause which is not even their own.



## The Subject in Recent American Painting

VIRGIL BARKER

**D**URING the last fifty years painting in Europe has been subjected to progressive purifications of subject-matter which played only too well into the hands of those annoying persons who insist on extracting morals from everything. It is not necessary, however, to be one of them in order to conclude, from that half-century of history, that painting can be purified to death.

In justified rebellion against the bad story-telling featured by salons and academies everywhere, the impressionists limited the subject to naturalistic atmosphere; yet they and the academicians had so much in common with their exaltation of craft that before long they united with the latter and set up another form of academicism. At once fresh rebellions occurred and various groups, giving themselves different labels in different countries but in historical perspective most conveniently called expressionists, commenced the elimination of natural appearances by intentional distortion; they desired both a more energetic character of design and an outright explosion of subjective emotion. A more severe asceticism was achieved by the cubists; their aim, at its purest, was to make their pictures self-sufficient by playing one tone, one texture, one shape, one plane against another in an abstract visual counterpoint. The later phenomenon in Holland of neo-plasticism went even further and transmogrified painting into a species of geometry. The naturalistic subject was as nearly as possible eliminated and painting was thus dehumanized. Propelled by successively exploding rocket-theories, art had shot to humanly insupportable limits toward the airless moon of pure painting.