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THE INHERITED FOREIGN POLICY

ALIKE in his triumphant career as President and in the somewhat tragic course of his after-life, Roosevelt's distinction as a great Liberal at home was eclipsed by the part which he played in international affairs. That part was in its main effects greatly beneficent, while he was in power. But events followed in presence of which, whatever he might do as a father and as a citizen, his public action, still conspicuous, could only be that of a critic — some would say of a prophet. And those events were the greatest of his own or of a long preceding time. So, strangely enough, the very definite deeds of this very practical person interest us to-day far less than the principles for which he may be supposed to have stood, or rather the temper which from first to last he breathed. There was something in that temper which was faulty, there was also much that was inspiring. I make no apology here for lingering, as I shall do, over affairs which arose before he became President, and in which he was at the most a subordinate actor, though they enlisted his sympathies very keenly.

His Presidency began shortly after the commence-

ment of a new period, in which the once isolated United States found that their interests — though to an extent which even yet an outsider should not judge hastily — were overlapping those of neighbors across the Atlantic and the Pacific. There was a rather mysterious little alarm concerning, in the first instance, Venezuela. It also was becoming obvious by now that questions about Asiatic labor would be a difficulty — perhaps a menace one day — to them, as also to most of the nations of the British Empire. The long agony of Cuba at their doors had drawn them into a war with Spain, which left them in possession of Spanish colonies. There was further a movement — evil in its very inception, whoever set it going — for the portioning-out of China among other Powers. To this America could not be indifferent, and the matter was complicated by the Boxer rising and the grave peril of all the Legations, including the American, besieged in Peking. Thus American public opinion was compelled, and has been so more or less ever since, to envisage from its fresh point of view questions of policy and of principle which, through the existence of the British Empire and of British trade, had long been recurrent causes of controversy in England, and to which (among us) newly awakened sympathy

with the peoples of the Dominions overseas had added zest. Here at any rate it was the fashion then to obscure such discussion by fallacious catch-words, such as "Imperialism," whether used as a term of pride or of reproach, and by general maxims to which the complex and shifting conditions of this world, with its actual needs and duties, do not adapt themselves. Nor does it seem to have been less so in America. In all other great countries — it should never be forgotten — the presence, constantly felt by every man and woman, of possibly dangerous neighbors, gives a different cast to current phrases and ideas.

What has been called the Expansion of Europe — the long but intermittent process, actuated sometimes by direct pressure of population but more often by the fear of exclusion from a market, and resulting in the annexation by strong Powers of uncivilized or weakly governed countries — had proceeded with increasing vigor after 1870; and, more recently, the passing away of Bismarck and his policy had added Germany to the list of claimants for territory overseas. Let it be granted at once that the collective proceedings of the European Powers in this respect presented at this time an unedifying spectacle, and that none of them stood above reproach. No Englishman, whatever his

preconceptions, could seriously study the history of the British Empire without upon the whole being stirred to deep gratitude and pride. But the elder among us recall incidents of that time of which we are not proud. Let it also be granted that the action of America, when McKinley was President and John Hay Secretary of State, was on the balance most highly creditable — conspicuously so in some parts of that business of China, which does not further concern our story.

But, this once said without reserve, there is a comment which I think should be added quite frankly upon the tone of American discussion of foreign affairs. Of the empires which have arisen out of the expansion of Europe, that which the original thirteen States set themselves from the first to win is the most considerable and by far the most profitable materially: so much so that the motive for further expansion was long ago completely suspended. If an outside critic with anything short of the friendliest feelings were to examine the history of its expansion, its treatment of its two subject races, the claims which it has staked out for its future influence, the customary temper of its diplomatic action, — with a few marked intervals when exceptional men have had charge, — and so on, he might find many aston-

ishingly unpleasant things to say. Yet grave and representative American writers seem serenely convinced of an altogether superior virtue prevailing in their country; and when a sound principle is enunciated and followed by America, — for instance, that the Filipinos should be governed with an unswerving view to their own welfare, as many millions of the weak subjects of other Powers have been governed for generations, — American youth are solemnly taught to regard it as a new and American invention. It would of course be as absurd to resent this attitude as it is absurd to adopt it; yet it is a bar to any wholesome influence which America might exercise on men's minds elsewhere, and hides from European eyes some merits justly to be attributed to that country. And this self-approving tendency, with which no doubt the Englishmen of a day not long ago could similarly be charged, seems in serious respects to falsify some American standards. It may be to some extent a bygone evil, or it may not; but it certainly seems to have been a common tendency, at the time of which I write, to treat the example which an exemplary country had set to its own self in the past as a sufficient guide for all future action; to be relatively uncritical of what followed along the track of past national practice; and when needs

and duties arose which an earlier generation could not have foreseen, to avoid facing them rather than run the risk of straying into the ways of the wicked Old World. From this demoralizing taint of national self-satisfaction the manlier patriotism of Roosevelt became more and more free.

The historical books which he wrote as a young man are indeed flavored with that quality which the greatest and most peace-loving of living American historians euphemistically calls "robust Americanism." Speaking, for example, of the boundary disputes of 1846, he ignores the then infant nation of Canada, and advocates the cherishing of an international quarrel till a convenient moment, in a way which is cynical unless it is childlike. Again, he must have heard of Napoleon, and it is hard to understand how a man could make a special study of the war of 1812 without betraying any sympathy one way or the other in that great world-contest in which America then elected to take a part.

American critics, who might not agree with me in these last two points, would yet say that in his Presidency he showed an aggressive disposition and a certain unsensitiveness to other people's possible rights. It would be rash to say that this is quite an unfounded censure, and I shall take some

pains to examine its insufficient foundation, but it most certainly ignores the points which a just criticism of him would put first.

In his maturity he was a man who loved the thought of his country's greatness — greatness in the largest sense. His imagination was profoundly impressed with the elements of strife then present (as most surely they were) in the world. He was anxious for his country's security. Believing that country to be honest, he thought it good for the world that it should be strong. He thought precisely the same in regard to any truly civilized State. He saw political and moral danger in any tendency to think peace rather than righteousness the final goal. Lastly, which is a somewhat different matter, his mind dwelt lovingly upon those manly and — no less — those womanly qualities sometimes more conspicuous in poor and struggling than in wealthy and secure peoples, which are the stay of family life, of the civic patriotism which grows out of it, and of any patriotism toward the larger human family which may grow out of that. Deeply did he distrust any ideas of progress which are founded in disparagement of older moralities. This is a summary of what will be found pervading all that he tried to teach. But it may be added that his disposition was to go for any purpose

which he set for himself by the straightest and shortest road.

We must be clear first as to the general principles of the policy which he had defended in the Presidential campaign and to which he was now in a sense the heir. It follows from what has been said that he was a great upholder of the Monroe Doctrine; but it also follows that he did not share that sense of entire aloofness from Europe and Asia which to many minds seemed involved in that doctrine:

Perhaps an Englishman can best understand this principle — not very appropriately called a doctrine — by the analogy, once used by Senator Lodge, of the foreign policy of the British Government of India. British India together with the Native States stands in a position of relative security while their present neighbors remain as they are. That security would be disturbed and a great burden thrown upon India by the advance of any foreign Power which was likely to have conquering ambitions, into much nearer neighborhood with India. And in a lesser degree the rise of anarchy or of an aggressive despotism in a Native State or an existing neighboring State would have the same result. Against such dangers the Home Government and the Indian Government have exercised and pre-

sumably will exercise a ceaseless watchfulness. Whether that watchfulness has always been wise in detail, or has occasionally become rather slack, and occasionally again nervously forcible, is a fair question. But in broad principle there is no question either about the legitimate interest of our governments in this matter or about their high responsibility in it to the peoples of India and to civilization.

Out of the necessarily indefinite British policy so described, certain also indefinite responsibilities to distant countries arise; but there is here no fit subject at present for any sort of express agreement or "regional understanding" (to borrow the phrase adopted in the late Peace Conference with reference to the Monroe Doctrine). An intelligent foreigner, say in France, would certainly, unless he himself entertained conquering ambitions, say that the whole business had better be left to the good sense and good conscience, not infallible but still pretty active, of that also curiously indefinable thing, the British Empire. Its responsibility to its own citizens must remain for the present unimpaired.

To the present critic from outside — who would resent the term "foreigner" in this connection — the Monroe Doctrine would seem to bear a very closely similar aspect. In Monroe's time it was of

serious concern to the future security of the then young America that Spain should not recover, by the help of all the other autocratic Powers, a great military empire in South and Central America. Incidentally the policy of Canning lay the same way, and the British Navy then — and with a brief interval ever since — sustained the Monroe Doctrine as Monroe's Secretary of State meant it should do. Unquestionably the interest of the United States was that of civilization. At a later day the same two interests were alike opposed to the scheme of Napoleon III to set up the unfortunate Maximilian in Mexico.

Later still the same interests coincided. In 1912 the following dialogue took place between an Englishman and a Prussian sea-captain: —

"What we English do not understand is whether you are building a fleet to sail to Paris or Moscow."

"I can quite understand you. What we really feel is not that we want to attack you, but that some day we shall want to expand somewhere and shall somehow find the British navy in the way."

"Where do you want to expand?"

"Oh, say Brazil."

This illustrates at once the good sense of Roosevelt's interest in Venezuela, and of his interest in the American Navy. And it justifies — not neces-

sarily every magniloquent statement of the famous Doctrine but the keeping of it in active life, and the keeping of it duly unlimited. It is an effective instrument of civilization, and the good sense and good conscience of the strongest Power in the Western world, and the growing amity between that Power and other American nations — of which, by the way, the second largest among the British Commonwealth of Nations is one — contribute more to the peace of the world than would any likely arrangement which weakened the Doctrine. Whatever imaginations must be permitted to Americans as to the actions of mere European countries in parallel cases, no European should allow himself to imagine, for example, that the American people will conquer Mexico unless the Mexicans really compel them to do so. The utmost abuse that could come of the Doctrine would be, say, that some conceivable Secretary of State — of the lesser sort, which seems sometimes to occur — should score an advantage in the way of concessions for an American oil-company, whose gain would leave its countrymen cold, over perhaps an English company, whose loss would cause no British tears to flow. Such a consideration, however real, is trumpery.

It is in this light that I touch upon a transaction for which I know of no quite adequate defense, but

which Roosevelt was prompt to applaud: the startling procedure by which in 1895-6 Cleveland and Secretary Olney, for both of whom he had a high regard, drove Lord Salisbury to accept arbitration in a boundary dispute with Venezuela. Cleveland had some motive — which in such a man must have been high-minded — for what seemed a fantastic outrage, and Roosevelt happened to know what the motive was; but it has never been made public. If he feared that some much more sinister action than that of Great Britain dealing with the obscure frontier in No Man's Land of an existing Colony, might become hard to stave off unless he exploded as he did, that would go a long way to justify him. It may be asked: Did the actual dispute then existing involve the Monroe Doctrine at all, unless upon some really piratical interpretation of it? If there was any seeming harshness in the British Government's attitude to Venezuela, may not Roosevelt's own view later as to how to treat "pithecoïd men" in Colombia have been applicable to Venezuela? Was the British objection to arbitration in this case less sound than Roosevelt's in the case of the Alaska boundary? Could not Cleveland have been sure of getting his substantial object with some exercise of elementary courtesy?

But I raise these questions to put them aside. These are secondary points after all; the main point is that the entering in of some European Power's acquisitiveness in South America was really a thing to be apprehended in those days of the great scramble for territory, and that the United States did better to bar it too hastily and too clumsily rather than too late and too half-heartedly. If it had happened, it must have been a fruitful cause of jealousy and strife and bloodshed.

Later incidents made it plain that Cleveland was Prussian only upon the surface. It should be added that English people then showed — though neither Roosevelt nor American historians since, with their references to the other troubles which may have restrained England then, seem ever to have noticed it — an instinctive conviction that war with the United States would for them, in any conceivable case, be a wicked war. Venezuela will recur to our notice very shortly, and again illustrate the fact that action which is condemned as aggressive is often that of a statesman ensuring peace.

The Monroe Doctrine is only one side of American tradition. Along with the sense that Europe should not meddle with them went the sense that they should not meddle with Europe. Both were

really part of the legacy of Washington. It was the interest of the then young America to guard against the most distant approach of European aggression; it will so continue as long as such aggression is conceivable. It was, Washington said, its interest to avoid "entangling alliances"; it is normally the true interest of all nations at all times. It was its interest to have as little concern as possible with external affairs except quite close to its doors; that was a result of conditions which were liable to change and have changed. That they have changed very greatly is undeniable, even though it may be absurd for agitated people in Europe to expect official American intervention at a distance (say in Armenia) which must make it both ignorant and impotent. American interests have crossed the Atlantic and even more evidently crossed the much wider Pacific. But one gathers that many Americans long felt that the Monroe Doctrine implied a sort of bargain: You shall not interfere with us; we will not interfere with you. The King of Spain, for example, shall not be a menace to us; we will not be an offense to him.

Such a feeling, though natural and honorable, was, if one may say so, intellectually and morally fallacious. No government's real duties can be so conveniently simplified; there was never any cle-

ment of bargain in the matter at all, only the eternal and ever difficult problem of right and wrong, cropping up in ever new and often unrelated practical difficulties, each to be met on its own merits.

In February 1895 there began a rebellion — not the first — in Cuba against Spain, the actual atrocity of which, and the destructive horrors resulting from the vain attempts of Spain to repress it, continued for three years to agitate American opinion. That American business interests had recently grown in Cuba does not affect the rights of the question or detract in the least from the genuineness of the sympathy of the vast majority of Americans. Opinion was divided as to the necessity and rightfulness of intervention. In February 1898 somebody blew up the American warship, *Maine*, in the harbor of Havana. Opinion naturally, if irrationally, precipitated itself in favor of decisive action.

Of the efforts of America, after the war, to establish a stable independent government in Cuba it would be difficult to speak too highly. Insurrectionary troubles in 1906 compelled Roosevelt to occupy the country two years; a briefer intervention occurred in 1916; but in the main the effort has prospered as well as could have been hoped.

Now Roosevelt was one of those who advocated war with Spain much earlier. Against him there are those who still think that it was right to hold off so long, and even that McKinley was wrong to go to war when he did, since it is conceivable that by longer patience with Spanish procrastination in diplomacy he might have secured Cuban independence without the formal responsibility for bloodshed. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that every important difference between Roosevelt and the critics of his own policy later may be decided on this one issue. Those who felt intense reluctance to interfering in what was (technically speaking) the internal affair of another Power, or to attacking what was (technically speaking) a friendly Power, urged considerations which are of course entitled to very great but not to exclusive weight. There is an initial presumption against intruding into a dispute between others, and an initial presumption for upholding such recognized and established rights as belong to an institution called a State; but both presumptions have their limits. The duties of an aggregate of men toward other such aggregates differ in some respects from those of individual neighbor to individual neighbor; but in some respects they are the same. Little good can be got from theoretical

elaboration of rules for guidance here; the sovereign rule is that in every case the mass of individual human rights and wrongs and weals and woes should be honestly and sympathetically regarded. The claim to be made for Roosevelt as an international statesman is that he tried to do this.

The Spanish dominion was an institution which age had made decrepit, not venerable, and which decrepitude had made hardly less cruel. The insurgents who suffered and perished during three years at the doors of the Americans included many of the very pick of the great Spanish race. Their position differed only in a minute technicality from that of the remoter Spanish colonists whom the Monroe Doctrine had been promulgated to protect. Their claim differed only by being stronger from that of the American Colonies themselves when they declared their independence with a resounding appeal to human rights. They could have been helped earlier, as they were later, by an effort not really formidable. To do so would have saved much misery and death. Whoever were or were not America's neighbors, they were. The American lives eventually risked or given to save them were gladly risked and given in a cause worth living for or dying for as may happen.

It is of course no great discredit to a vast

multitude such as the American people that they did not collectively see things like this quicker. But these are the sort of things which, right or wrong, Roosevelt habitually saw. And such was Roosevelt in his Presidency and in his closing years.

Before passing from the policies which he merely inherited and completed, reference must be made to the Philippines. Of Porto Rico, which became an American dependency, nothing need be said. But the Philippine Islands were in insurrection against Spain when a turn of the war threw them into American hands, and ill chance kept them still insurgent. No American had any wish to keep them, and no American stood to gain a halfpenny out of them. It is evident that no decent course was open save either to keep and govern them for the present, or at once to start them on an independent course and to protect their independence.

Could they have then been made independent like Cuba? No man not very fully informed about the Philippines ought to venture upon an opinion. Generalities about the "white man's burden" do not settle the question, nor do the cynicisms on that subject too often quoted beyond our shores from evil-minded Englishmen who disbelieve in their own folk. British Governments with their necessarily large experience in such questions have sometimes

acted wisely either in accepting or in rejecting such new responsibilities, and sometimes unwisely in either way. Generally, as the considerations which did in fact decide them have come out afterwards, they have been proved to have acted uprightly. McKinley had all the attainable facts before him. Cautious man as he was, he surely rose to a higher level than those who would have wished him not to "venture on untried paths." He "walked the White House night after night until midnight, and . . . went down on [his] knees and prayed to Almighty God for light and guidance. . . . And one night late it came to [him] this way: [he] did not know how it was, but it came: that . . ." that, in short, he saw the alternatives clear, and felt sure "that there was nothing . . . to do but to take them all [all the islands] and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace to do the very best we could by them as our fellow men for whom Christ also died." He guided his steps by a less illusory light than that of common statesmen or common theorists about imperialism and its opposite, in the vague. He, and Roosevelt his heir, and Mr. Taft and Mr. Root — who at Roosevelt's pressing request sacrificed their personal ambitions, to become respectively Governor of the

Philippines and head of the department of Government concerned — in their several degrees earned the honor of all to whom the cause of the weaker races remains as dear as it was to some of our fathers.