

VII

FOREIGN ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE FIRST TERM

ROOSEVELT'S own administration of foreign affairs affords a succession of striking incidents, not very closely connected. Several lesser matters, highly creditable as a rule, must be ignored here. The triumphs of his dexterous forcefulness and swift decision during his first term demand, unfortunately, to be discussed at length if at all. The successes — in reality more shining — which followed in his second term were of a kind which can be indicated more briefly; but the rather tedious controversies into which I shall have first to enter exhibit fully, without much need for comment, the strength (and any little lurking weakness) of the man.

In December 1902 the Monroe Doctrine was put to such a test as perhaps Cleveland or Roosevelt foresaw in the affair of Venezuela six years earlier. German, British, and Italian subjects had unsatisfied claims against the Venezuelan government which their own governments had agreed to take up. A German squadron, with some British vessels, now began a blockade of the Venezuelan coast. Great Britain — in Roosevelt's opinion — was half-

hearted in the matter and acted merely with the still prevailing idea of propitiating Germany. The claims in question were sound. The Venezuelan President's conduct was unsatisfactory; and Roosevelt, taking a view which hardly accords with the most extreme statements of the Monroe Doctrine, said that there would have been no objection to punitive action by European Powers, in itself. But he believed that Germany had designs of taking permanent possession of some Venezuelan harbor under cover of a long lease like that of Kiaochow and making it a fortified naval station; and his objection to this was all the stronger because it would have threatened the projected Panama Canal. Quiet diplomatic procedure through the State Department could not make Germany consent to arbitration or extract an assurance that there should be no forced lease of territory. Roosevelt then assembled in West Indian waters a battle fleet under Admiral Dewey, for manœuvres as the public supposed, but with orders — known to six persons at the outside — to be ready for instant action. At that time and at that distance the German navy would have been powerless against it. Then he personally saw the German Ambassador, explained the naval situation to him, and said that Dewey would sail, with orders to prevent any landing in

Venezuela, unless within a stated time the Germans accepted arbitration. When some days later the Ambassador paid a friendly call and had nothing to report on this matter, he was told that Dewey would now be ordered to sail a day before the date previously mentioned. Then he consulted friends who told him that Roosevelt did not "bluff." About this time Mr. Balfour, now Prime Minister, found a way of letting the world know that England would rather sympathize with American anxiety about Venezuela.

The day before Dewey was to sail, the German Emperor accepted arbitration. He solaced himself by recalling his Ambassador, and eagerly begged Roosevelt to be the arbitrator. Roosevelt's advisers, who reflected that America also had claims on Venezuela, very properly persuaded him that the Hague Tribunal should receive the practical recognition of being asked to arbitrate. Moreover, he most justly insisted that the European Naval Powers concerned should get no preference in payment over smaller European Powers with similar claims. Much complimentary intercourse now began between him and the German Emperor, who probably flattered himself ever after that they were similar characters; and the prompt vigor with which Roosevelt had coerced Germany — and in

a less degree England and Italy — remained secret till after the Great War had begun. Roosevelt's own account of the matter concludes by rejoicing at the good example set by great Powers thus submitting their differences with smaller Powers to arbitration.

One of his own first acts as President had been a refusal — whether for sufficient reasons or not — to set that very example in a dispute with Canada about the boundary of Alaska; for essentially this was a dispute between the United States and a much smaller nation, whose claims, if extravagant, were not more so than those of Venezuela had been in that earlier Venezuelan controversy of 1895 in which Cleveland enforced arbitration. Great Britain, where Chamberlain was at the time bringing a new inspiration into the work of the Colonial Office, was concerned in this matter only as the trustee (in foreign affairs) of the younger nations, in a community of nations then at an early stage in the slow and delicate process of evolving relations of equal partnership. When an American writer — even Hay, if I remember — speaks in such a connection of being asked to give territory to England, he uses a phrase which conveys a seriously false suggestion. Owing to discoveries of gold, the Dominion Government of Canada had

become keenly interested in far-off Yukon. Much annoyance began to be felt because Yukon was deprived of near access to any but Arctic seas by the long strip of coastal territory (running hundreds of miles south, and overlapping British Columbia) which an ancient treaty between Russia and Great Britain had assigned to Alaska before the United States bought it in 1867. The treaty no doubt had been based upon the rights created by occupation at the time, and there can be no doubt that the intention was to give a substantial strip of coast to Russia and not a string of detached headlands. Most unfortunately, the Dominion Government was advised to set up an interpretation of the treaty which gave Yukon access to the sea at several inlets. At least one greatly respected Canadian lawyer held this view passionately; but it is not, as I venture to think, possible to defend it.

When a Joint High Commission was appointed to discuss a number of relatively small differences between the two countries, Americans were inclined to be indignant at the insistence of Canada that the Alaskan claim should be included: it appeared to them as if some Power, with a number of fair subjects of difference to be adjusted with England, should put in a fantastic claim, say, to the Orkneys, for the purpose of trading it off in the negotiations.

The attitude of the British and Canadian representatives while the Commission sat at Washington in 1898-9 impressed John Hay, with all his keen desire for friendly relations with England, very unfavorably. He was convinced that the American Commissioners had treated the matters in dispute liberally; and his indignation at the way in which they had been met was directed less against the Canadians present than against the mere dexterous attorneyship with which our country was represented by Herschell, the ex-Lord-Chancellor. It is fair to add that, in the time between the Jameson Raid and the Boer War, the British Government generally and the Colonial Secretary in particular may not have impressed American observers as very tender in dealing with other people's rights.

The Commission having broken down, long fruitless negotiations followed, in which Great Britain proposed arbitration. McKinley would have faced the Senate with any reasonable proposal for a treaty, whether for arbitration or otherwise. Hay did not at all like to let a claim, which he felt should never have been made by Canada, be made subject to "the fatal tendency of all arbitrators to compromise," and he perceived differences, whatever they may have been, between this case and that of Venezuela in 1895; but he said, "It

looks as if we were refusing to England what England, at our demand, granted to Venezuela." That is what Roosevelt promptly did when he came in. Some of his reasons can be inferred from what has been said; and it should be said further that two countries which speak the same language can generally settle their differences between themselves better — as well as more quickly — than foreign arbitrators could do it.

In 1903 there met in London a new Commission: three Americans, two Canadians, and the Lord Chief Justice of England (Alverstone), to whom it fell to give the deciding vote against the Canadian claim in the Alaskan matter. There is reason to think that the American Commissioners insisted very little upon some of their minor claims, though they believed them to be in themselves sound. When the new Commission was to meet, Roosevelt took a step characteristically drastic and characteristically gentle in manner, to make a miscarriage unlikely — or in other words to prevent any influence that might make the Lord Chief Justice vote wrong. Avoiding the offensiveness of any diplomatic representation, he wrote to a valued American friend of his own and of the British statesmen concerned, and asked to have his real determination made known to them in friendly

conversation. It was, he said, only his "very earnest desire to get on well with England" which had made him consent to this second Commission. If it failed, he should take measures which would make arbitration quite impossible, and use the troops (which in fact he had sent to Alaska to keep order) to "run the line as we desire it, without any further regard to the attitude of England and Canada. . . . If," he said, "I paid regard to mere abstract right, that is the position that I ought to take anyhow; I have not taken it, because I wish to exhaust every effort to have the affair settled peacefully and with due regard to England's dignity." This step of his was of course not publicly known till long afterward.

The end of the whole business was entirely satisfactory: the sufficiently high-spirited British Minister to whom more particularly this pressure was applied obviously felt no offense; nor need anybody feel aggrieved about it now.

Whatever Roosevelt's real motive may have been, there is obviously something to admire in his action. Yet it may be asked, whether McKinley's attitude, as described by Hay, was not the stronger and the more dignified, and whether there was not a dangerous flaw somewhere in the man who so much applauded Cleveland in 1895 and yet was so set

against arbitration a few years later. I put these questions with little doubt as to the true answer. He prided himself later on having in this instance removed "the last obstacle to absolute agreement between the two peoples," and he was certainly sincere. Now for this purpose the least risk of an arbitration which even seemed to issue in less than justice to America was a thing to be most carefully avoided, in the then prevailing temper of his own country. Of that temper in such a case Hay had lately been regretting an instance on which it is needless for me to dwell. In the subtle stroke by which Roosevelt secured that our country should do manifest justice, I believe that he worked most honestly for the cause of friendship between our peoples, which, neither more nor less than that of friendship between America and her neighbors generally, he had most deeply at heart.

I have dwelt upon this matter at such length because it seems to me a good test-case of Roosevelt's manner and spirit in his dealings, and because I happen to have a very warm affection for Canada and a passionate interest in the evolution of the British Empire. I do not want to be dogmatic, but I think it perhaps significant that I began to study this point with feelings of intense indignation against Roosevelt, and that I end with the

absolute conviction that he did both a very able and a most right and friendly thing.

American comments have often been very severe upon the most conspicuous instance which he gave of swift decision in dubious circumstances. The idea of a great canal from Atlantic to Pacific is very old. It had been the subject of practical discussion since before 1850. Three routes — across the Isthmus of Panama, by way of the great lake of Nicaragua, and across part of Mexico — had been considered. No State or combination of States through whose territory it would pass could possibly afford to make it; it must be made by a foreign State or States or by a foreign company. America had obvious interests — greater even than might be supposed, since the quickest way from New York to San Francisco was: first by sea to Colon, by land across the Isthmus, and then by sea from Panama. England was interested too, as the country with the greatest sea-trade. In 1850 these Powers entered into the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, which was intended to lead to the construction of a canal by the two together but in practical effect merely restrained America from undertaking this alone. The treaty was obscure in certain points on which close agreement was necessary. If fair treatment for everybody's shipping was assured, America could justly

claim a special interest in the future canal which no European Power could have. Naturally no joint action ever was taken.

Meanwhile, the success of the Suez Canal led to the floating of a great French Company which procured a concession from the Government of Colombia for a canal from Colon to Panama. The scandals in which the enterprise came to an end in 1888 are best forgotten, if only the heroic life of Lesseps, whose last years it darkened, be remembered. The derelict undertaking of the Company, with certain assets, — of which control of the railway across the Isthmus was the chief, — passed to a new French Company, which could effect no more than to obtain from the Colombian Government the extension of the concession for some years after its original period would have lapsed.

John Hay, upon becoming Secretary of State in 1898, spent great trouble in negotiating a new treaty with England in order to get rid of the old treaty in a friendly way. But the Senate in 1900 rejected his new treaty. The gravest objection to it was that it precluded the United States from fortifying any canal which they might construct or from obtaining sovereign rights over the strips of land on each bank of it. Among the stoutest protesters against this was Roosevelt. His interest

in naval matters, stimulated by the Spanish War, made a very serious point plain to him. When that war broke out, the Atlantic and Pacific fleets were separated by the length of the whole long voyage round South America. If the United States possessed a canal and could hold it by land forces, the additional strength given to their navy would be very great. If they could not so hold it, the canal might easily become an added cause of weakness in a war with naval Powers. This was a far-seeing view. It can now be seen that a combination of Germany and Japan against the United States would not have been a wildly imaginary risk to ensure against.

Recovering from great disappointment, Hay after a while approached Lord Salisbury again, found him very friendly, and eventually got a new and amended treaty ratified by the Senate a few months after Roosevelt became President. About the same time a Commission appointed by McKinley reported that the Nicaraguan route would be cheaper for a canal than the route by Panama. This judgment rested upon the fact that the new French Company was asking \$109,141,500 as the purchase price of its property, whereas the Commission thought that it was worth only \$40,000,000; had the price asked been this lesser sum, the Panama route would,

according to the Commission, have been the cheaper. The conflict between interested and disinterested opinions favoring one route or the other became brisk in the United States.

In 1848, when California was ceded to the United States, the latter had made a treaty with Colombia, then New Granada, whereby, among other pledges of eternal friendship between the two countries, the United States acquired rights of police or military intervention in Panama to safeguard traffic across the Isthmus, and at the same time guaranteed the neutrality of Colombian territory. This guaranty was intended as against foreign invasion, not domestic insurrection, though as a matter of fact the countless interventions of America, with more or less force, on the Isthmus ever since, often requested by Colombia, had several times (once under Cleveland) taken the form of putting down insurrections by the Panama people.

The State of Panama was in international law part of the territory of Colombia, but the rights of the State, under the constitution supposed to be in force, had been violently suppressed in 1886, and without any plausible pretext of right it had become a despotically governed dependency. Moreover Panama, where there must naturally have sprung up a comparatively bustling and perhaps

unpleasantly cosmopolitan community, was shut off from the bulk of Colombia by great mountain masses, and was accessible from the capital, Bogota, only by a fortnight's journey, including a sea voyage. The government of Colombia was exercised — without impediment from a Congress which never assembled — by President Maroquin. This gentleman, having in 1898 been elected Vice-President with the duty of filling the President's place in his absence, proceeded two years later to place the President in a cage and despatch him and his cage on a bullock cart across the mountains to a spot not far, but far enough, from the capital. Therefore, the President being absent, the Vice-President reigned, and, when two years afterwards the President expired in captivity, succeeded to his title. Such was that free Republic, sister and equal (as some said) to the American Republic, whose right to exact payment in respect of any possible canal across the Isthmus constituted its most precious asset — or rather, it should perhaps be said, the most precious asset of President Maroquin and his friends, whose wrongs at the hands of Roosevelt are now to be considered. And such was the relation of that Republic to the people actually dwelling in the country to which this valuable right of sovereignty related.

After the report of the Commission in favor of the Nicaraguan route, a bill was introduced in Congress empowering the President to construct a canal that way. Somewhat later the Commission made a further and other report, and the bill was amended in such a manner as to require the President, if it should prove possible, to make the canal across the Isthmus of Panama instead. No doubt much manoeuvre and intrigue on the part of interested people was going on, and payments to persons and to party funds may have been made. But the simple and straightforward explanation of the change lies in the facts that, after the first report of the Commission the French Company decided to content itself with \$40,000,000; and further, that a timely and exemplary performance on the part of Mont Pelée in the West Indies called attention to the great danger threatening any canal in a country so volcanic as Nicaragua. Roosevelt himself was strongly persuaded of the advantages of the Panama route. It goes without saying that by this time his whole heart was set upon speedily proceeding at last with so great a work so long deferred.

Hay negotiated a treaty with Maroquin's representative in Washington, who was certainly acting under instructions, and the American Senate ratified it in March 1903. It gave the Colombian Govern-

ment a lump sum of \$10,000,000, equal to two thirds of its then public debt, besides a rental of \$250,000 to commence nine years later. It then occurred to persons in Colombia that a larger rental should be demanded, and further, that a considerable part of the price to be paid to the French Company should be paid to Colombia instead. So the Colombian Congress, which had been for five years nonexistent, met at last in June and July 1903 and duly voted the ratification of the Treaty, subject to amendments for these purposes which the Senate of the United States would certainly not accept.

It was duly felt by Americans as a comic thing that they, of all people in the world, should feel aggrieved at this failure of another country to ratify a treaty once negotiated. But there is no doubt whatsoever that the action of the Colombian Congress was a farce, produced on the stage by the executive who had negotiated the treaty. Maroquin himself, too late, offered to summon another Congress which would do as it was told. Roosevelt, who was certainly well informed, believed this business to be a scheme of a few corrupt people who would lay hold of whatever payments, larger or smaller, were made to Colombia. Not only Hay but Mr. Root entirely shared the contempt with

which he resolved to treat the whole proceeding. Nothing more need be said about the Colombian Government than that, upon the failure of these demands for more money, it made a discovery that its own concession of an additional term of years to the French Company was invalid by its own laws, with the result that in 1904, when the original term would expire, it would treat all the property of the French Company as having been forfeited to Colombia.

From the moment of the breakdown of this treaty, preparations for revolution in Panama began. Four things can be said with certainty about the revolution: Active steps to promote it were taken in the United States, notably by Monsieur Bunau-Varilla, an enthusiastic French gentleman who had worked in Panama under Lesseps and now hurried over from Paris for this purpose. Signs of readiness to revolt were manifested from the very first by prominent natives of Panama, including the Governor whom Maroquin appointed and the delegates whom he summoned to the Congress. Roosevelt and Hay knew well that revolution was coming and were doubtless glad of it. Neither of them by act or word promoted it. A revolution may none the less express the prevailing desire where it happens because it has plenty of sympa-

thizers and helpers abroad; and in this case the suggestion that the revolution was not to be treated as genuine is preposterous. What known human motive was likely to withhold most people in Panama, under the circumstances, from asserting their independence, if they could?

When reports from Panama assured Roosevelt that an outbreak was imminent, he acted upon his clear right and duty under the treaty of 1848 by sending ships to the Isthmus, with orders to prevent a landing of armed forces by either side within a certain distance of the railway. The first ship was just too late to prevent a landing of Colombian troops; but her commander succeeded among other things in keeping quiet a Colombian officer, who at one moment, wanted to bombard Colon and massacre all Americans there. After some excitement, during which one Chinaman lost his life, the independence of Panama was formally proclaimed on November 4 with every sign of general acquiescence at the very least, including an unanimous vote by the municipality of the city of Panama, and the Colombian generals there were induced to sail home with their troops next day. On the sixth of November a telegraphic despatch from Hay recognized the new Government. When Colombia attempted to send troops by sea to regain

possession of the lost province, Roosevelt, with his ships on the spot, prevented it. By November 18 Hay, working in hot haste, concluded with Bunau-Varilla — now envoy from Panama — a new treaty. The overtures of Colombia for undoing the past were set aside; and the Canal, on which work soon started under Roosevelt's close and constant supervision, has in spite of great difficulties of more than one kind been triumphantly accomplished.

Judgment on what thus happened has been somewhat obscured by much talk of things which did not happen. In 1908, before the election of Mr. Taft, certain journals gave currency to a story that his brother and Roosevelt's brother-in-law had received certain payments from the French Company. The implication of these stories — themselves soon disavowed and disproved — was of course that the Government of the United States had been corrupted. Roosevelt (very intelligibly) felt that this was no slander of individuals but an injurious attack upon the country itself. He conceived, or was advised, that a criminal action lay against the offending journalists in the Federal Courts. The Courts happily (as I conceive) held otherwise. Meanwhile one newspaper interested in the matter, quietly dropping the original charges, employed an enterprising member of its staff to

inquire into the intrigues carried on in America by an agent of the French Company, the supposed connection of Roosevelt with those intrigues leading to the further suggestion that the whole story throughout was a wicked conspiracy of his against Colombia. The evidence which this good gentleman got together is to be found printed in imposing bulk in the report of a Congressional Committee. The whole mass of it is totally worthless, depending as it does upon the evidence which the said agent of the French Company unsuccessfully put forward in an arbitration in Paris for the purpose of magnifying the services which he had rendered to that Company. It should never again be referred to as an authority for anything.

Dismissing this superstructure of rubbish, what truth can we find in the severe censures upon Roosevelt which are based on the avowed facts? It is wholly creditable to American feeling that his prompt and rough handling of the Colombian Government caused a shock and long misgivings, and one's heart goes out to Senator Hoar who, after listening for a while incuriously to long explanations from the President, rose quietly and, expressing a hope that he would not be made to blush for his country, went out. Yet, with great respect, surely such men were in error. What was the moral

basis of that sovereignty of Maroquin over the people or the land of Panama, which it is held that Roosevelt should have treated tenderly? True, every upsetting of any established authority among men brings certain evils in its train, and the dethronement of the worst usurped power is not pure gain. In this case the full extent of the harm was a certain natural resentment against the United States on the part of better republics than Colombia in South and Central America, resentment which, if it had no better and more lasting causes, was certain quickly to pass away.

Was Roosevelt to have hunted out supposed conspirators against Colombia, in America? The precedent that would have been created will not bear thinking of. Was he to have taken any active steps at all to keep Panama under? That too would have been a crime. Was he, when the revolution had happened, to allow — when he could prevent it by a word — a bloody reconquest of Panama and a worse repetition than ever of all its old disorders? ~~That~~ That would have been more in accordance with precedent, but surely in any humane estimation of actions and their consequences it would have been the worst crime of all.