

33: THE SENTIMENTALIST

"Sentimentalism is the most broken reed on which righteousness can lean"; these were, I think, the exact words of a distinguished American visitor at the Guildhall, and may Heaven forgive me if I do him a wrong. It was spoken in illustration of the folly of supporting Egyptian and other Oriental nationalism, and it has tempted me to some reflections on the first word of the sentence.

The Sentimentalist, roughly speaking, is the man who wants to eat his cake and have it. He has no sense of honour about ideas; he will not see that one must pay for an idea as for anything else. He will not see that any worthy idea, like any honest woman, can only be won on its own terms, and with its logical chain of loyalty. One idea attracts him; another idea really inspires him; a third idea flatters him; a fourth idea pays him. He will have them all at once in one wild intellectual harem, no matter how much they quarrel and contradict each other. The Sentimentalist is a philosophic profligate, who tries to capture every mental beauty without reference to its rival beauties; who will not even be off with the old love before he is on with the new. Thus if a man were to say, "I love this woman, but I may some day find my affinity in some other woman," he would be a Sentimentalist. He would be saying, "I will eat my wedding-cake and keep it." Or if a man should say, "I am a Republican, believing in the equality of citizens; but when the Government has given me my peerage I can do infinite good as a kind landlord and a wise legislator"; then that man would be a Sentimentalist. He would be trying to keep at the same time the classic austerity of equality and also the vulgar excitement of an aristocrat. Or if a man should say, "I am in favour of religious equality; but I must preserve the Protestant Succession," he would be a Sentimentalist of a grosser and more improbable kind.

This is the essence of the Sentimentalist: that he seeks to enjoy every idea without its sequence, and every pleasure without its consequence.

Now it would really be hard to find a worse case of this inconsequent sentimentalism than the theory of the British Empire advanced by Mr. Roosevelt himself in his attack on Sentimentalists. For the Imperial theory, the Roosevelt and Kipling theory, of our relation to Eastern races is simply one of eating the Oriental cake (I suppose a Sultana Cake) and at the same time leaving it alone.

Now there are two sane attitudes of a European statesman towards Eastern peoples, and there are only two.

First, he may simply say that the less we have to do with them the better; that

whether they are lower than us or higher they are so catastrophically different that the more we go our way and they go theirs the better for all parties concerned. I will confess to some tenderness for this view. There is much to be said for letting that calm immemorial life of slave and sultan, temple and palm tree flow on as it has always flowed. The best reason of all, the reason that affects me most finally, is that if we left the rest of the world alone we might have some time for attending to our own affairs, which are urgent to the point of excruciation. All history points to this; that intensive cultivation in the long run triumphs over the widest extensive cultivation; or, in other words, that making one's own field superior is far more effective than reducing other people's fields to inferiority. If you cultivate your own garden and grow a specially large cabbage, people will probably come to see it. Whereas the life of one selling small cabbages round the whole district is often forlorn.

Now, the Imperial Pioneer is essentially a commercial traveller; and a commercial traveller is essentially a person who goes to see people because they don't want to see him. As long as empires go about urging their ideas on others, I always have a notion that the ideas are no good. If they were really so splendid, they would make the country preaching them a wonder of the world. That is the true ideal; a great nation ought not to be a hammer, but a magnet. Men went to the mediaeval Sorbonne because it was worth going to. Men went to old Japan because only there could they find the unique and exquisite old Japanese art. Nobody will ever go to modern Japan (nobody worth bothering about, I mean), because modern Japan has made the huge mistake of going to the other people: becoming a common empire. The mountain has condescended to Mahomet; and henceforth Mahomet will whistle for it when he wants it.

That is my political theory: that we should make England worth copying instead of telling everybody to copy her.

But it is not the only possible theory. There is another view of our relations to such places as Egypt and India which is entirely tenable. It may be said, "We Europeans are the heirs of the Roman Empire; when all is said we have the largest freedom, the most exact science, the most solid romance. We have a deep though undefined obligation to give as we have received from God; because the tribes of men are truly thirsting for these things as for water. All men really want clear laws: we can give clear laws. All men really want hygiene: we can give hygiene. We are not merely imposing Western ideas. We are simply fulfilling human ideas--for the first time."

On this line, I think, it is possible to justify the forts of Africa and the railroads of Asia; but on this line we must go much further. If it is our duty to give our best, there can be no doubt about what is our best. The greatest thing our Europe has

made is the Citizen: the idea of the average man, free and full of honour, voluntarily invoking on his own sin the just vengeance of his city. All else we have done is mere machinery for that: railways exist only to carry the Citizen; forts only to defend him; electricity only to light him, medicine only to heal him. Popularism, the idea of the people alive and patiently feeding history, that we cannot give; for it exists everywhere, East and West. But democracy, the idea of the people fighting and governing--that is the only thing we have to give.

Those are the two roads. But between them weakly wavers the Sentimentalist--that is, the Imperialist of the Roosevelt school. He wants to have it both ways, to have the splendours of success without the perils. Europe may enslave Asia, because it is flattering; but Europe must not free Asia, because that is responsible. It tickles his Imperial taste that Hindoos should have European hats: it is too dangerous if they have European heads. He cannot leave Asia Asiatic: yet he dare not contemplate Asia as European. Therefore he proposes to have in Egypt railway signals, but not flags; despatch boxes, but not ballot boxes.

In short, the Sentimentalist decides to spread the body of Europe without the soul.