

THE SULTAN

There is one deep defect in our extension of cosmopolitan and Imperial cultures. That is, that in most human things if you spread your butter far you spread it thin. But there is an odder fact yet: rooted in something dark and irrational in human nature. That is, that when you find your butter thin, you begin to spread it. And it is just when you find your ideas wearing thin in your own mind that you begin to spread them among your fellow-creatures. It is a paradox; but not my paradox. There are numerous cases in history; but I think the strongest case is this. That we have Imperialism in all our clubs at the very time when we have Orientalism in all our drawing-rooms.

I mean that the colonial ideal of such men as Cecil Rhodes did not arise out of any fresh creative idea of the Western genius, it was a fad, and like most fads an imitation. For what was wrong with Rhodes was not that, like Cromwell or Hildebrand, he made huge mistakes, nor even that he committed great crimes. It was that he committed these crimes and errors in order to spread certain ideas. And when one asked for the ideas they could not be found. Cromwell stood for Calvinism, Hildebrand for Catholicism: but Rhodes had no principles whatever to give to the world. He had only a hasty but elaborate machinery for spreading the principles that he hadn't got. What he called his ideals were the dregs of a Darwinism which had already grown not only stagnant, but poisonous. That the fittest must survive, and that any one like himself must be the fittest; that the weakest must go to the wall, and that any one he could

not understand must be the weakest; that was the philosophy which he lumberingly believed through life, like many another agnostic old bachelor of the Victorian era. All his views on religion (reverently quoted in the Review of Reviews) were simply the stalest ideas of his time. It was not his fault, poor fellow, that he called a high hill somewhere in South Africa "his church." It was not his fault, I mean, that he could not see that a church all to oneself is not a church at all. It is a madman's cell. It was not his fault that he "figured out" that God meant as much of the planet to be Anglo-Saxon as possible." Many evolutionists much wiser had "figured out" things even more babyish. He was an honest and humble recipient of the plodding popular science of his time; he spread no ideas that any cockney clerk in Streatham could not have spread for him. But it was exactly because he had no ideas to spread that he invoked slaughter, violated justice, and ruined republics to spread them.

But the case is even stronger and stranger. Fashionable Imperialism not only has no ideas of its own to extend; but such ideas as it has are actually borrowed from the brown and black peoples to whom it seeks to extend them. The Crusading kings and knights might be represented as seeking to spread Western ideas in the East. But all that our Imperialist aristocrats could do would be to spread Eastern ideas in the East. For that very governing class which urges Occidental Imperialism has been deeply discoloured with Oriental mysticism and Cosmology.

The same society lady who expects the Hindoos to accept her view of

politics has herself accepted their view of religion. She wants first to steal their earth, and then to share their heaven. The same Imperial cynic who wishes the Turks to submit to English science has himself submitted to Turkish philosophy, to a wholly Turkish view of despotism and destiny.

There is an obvious and amusing proof of this in a recent life of Rhodes. The writer admits with proper Imperial gloom the fact that Africa is still chiefly inhabited by Africans. He suggests Rhodes in the South confronting savages and Kitchener in the North facing Turks, Arabs, and Soudanese, and then he quotes this remark of Cecil Rhodes: "It is inevitable fate that all this should be changed; and I should like to be the agent of fate." That was Cecil Rhodes's one small genuine idea; and it is an Oriental idea.

Here we have evident all the ultimate idiocy of the present Imperial position. Rhodes and Kitchener are to conquer Moslem bedouins and barbarians, in order to teach them to believe only in inevitable fate. We are to wreck provinces and pour blood like Niagara, all in order to teach a Turk to say "Kismet"; which he has said since his cradle. We are to deny Christian justice and destroy international equality, all in order to teach an Arab to believe he is "an agent of fate," when he has never believed anything else. If Cecil Rhodes's vision could come true (which fortunately is increasingly improbable), such countries as Persia or Arabia would simply be filled with ugly and vulgar fatalists in billycocks, instead of with graceful and dignified fatalists in turbans.

The best Western idea, the idea of spiritual liberty and danger, of a doubtful and romantic future in which all things may happen—this essential Western idea Cecil Rhodes could not spread, because (as he says himself) he did not believe in it.

It was an Oriental who gave to Queen Victoria the crown of an Empress in addition to that of a Queen. He did not understand that the title of King is higher than that of Emperor. For in the East titles are meant to be vast and wild; to be extravagant poems: the Brother of the Sun and Moon, the Caliph who lives for ever. But a King of England (at least in the days of real kings) did not bear a merely poetical title; but rather a religious one. He belonged to his people and not merely they to him. He was not merely a conqueror, but a father—yes, even when he was a bad father. But this sort of solid sanctity always goes with local affections and limits: and the Cecil Rhodes Imperialism set up not the King, but the Sultan; with all the typically Eastern ideas of the magic of money, of luxury without uproar; of prostrate provinces and a chosen race. Indeed Cecil Rhodes illustrated almost every quality essential to the Sultan, from the love of diamonds to the scorn of woman.