

XI. "THE WHITE MAN'S BURTHEN"

One of the most curious aspects of the British "Pacifist" is his willingness to give over great blocks of the black and coloured races to the Hohenzollerns to exploit and experiment upon. I myself being something of a pacifist, and doing what I can, in my corner, to bring about the Peace of the World, the Peace of the World triumphant and armed against every disturber, could the more readily sympathise with the passive school of Pacifists if its proposals involved the idea that England should keep to England and Germany to Germany. My political ideal is the United States of the World, a union of states whose state boundaries are determined by what I have defined as the natural map of mankind. I cannot understand those pacifists who talk about the German right to "expansion," and babble about a return of her justly lost colonies. That seems to me not pacificism but patriotic inversion. This large disposition to hand over our fellow-creatures to a Teutonic educational system, with "frightfulness" in reserve, to "efficiency" on Wittenberg lines, leaves me--hot. The ghosts of the thirst-tormented Hereros rise up in their thousands from the African dust, protesting.

This talk of "legitimate expansion" is indeed now only an exploiter's cant. The age of "expansion," the age of European "empires" is near its end. No one who can read the signs of the times in Japan, in India, in China, can doubt it. It ended in America a hundred years ago; it is ending now in Asia; it will end last in Africa, and even in Africa the

end draws near. Spain has but led the way which other "empires" must follow. Look at her empire in the atlases of 1800. She fell down the steps violently and painfully, it is true--but they are difficult to descend. No sane man, German or anti-German, who has weighed the prospects of the new age, will be desirous of a restoration of the now vanished German colonial empire, vindictive, intriguing, and unscrupulous, a mere series of centres of attack upon adjacent territory, to complicate the immense disentanglements and readjustments that lie already before the French and British and Italians.

Directly we discuss the problem of the absolutely necessary permanent alliance that this war has forced upon at least France, Belgium, Britain and Russia, this problem of the "empires" faces us. What are these Allies going to do about their "subject races"? What is the world going to do about the "subject races"? It is a matter in which the "subject races" are likely to have an increasingly important voice of their own. We Europeans may discuss their fate to-day among ourselves; we shall be discussing it with them to-morrow. If we do not agree with them then, they will take their fates in their own hands in spite of us. Long before A.D. 2100 there will be no such thing as a "subject race" in all the world.

Here again we find ourselves asking just that same difficult question of more or less, that arises at every cardinal point of our review of the probable future. How far is this thing going to be done finely; how far is it going to be done cunningly and basely? How far will greatness of

mind, how far will imaginative generosity, prevail over the jealous and pettifogging spirit that lurks in every human being? Are French and British and Belgians and Italians, for example, going to help each other in Africa, or are they going to work against and cheat each other? Is the Russian seeking only a necessary outlet to the seas of the world, or has he dreams of Delhi? Here again, as in all these questions, personal idiosyncrasy comes in; I am strongly disposed to trust the good in the Russian.

But apart from this uncertain question of generosity, there are in this case two powerful forces that make against disputes, secret disloyalties, and meanness. One is that Germany will certainly be still dangerous at the end of the war, and the second is that the gap in education, in efficiency, in national feeling and courage of outlook, between the European and the great Asiatic and African communities, is rapidly diminishing. If the Europeans squabble much more for world ascendancy, there will be no world ascendancy for them to squabble for. We have still no means of measuring the relative enfeeblement of Europe in comparison with Asia already produced by this war. As it is, certain things are so inevitable--the integration of a modernised Bengal, of China, and of Egypt, for example--that the question before us is practically reduced to whether this restoration of the subject peoples will be done with the European's aid and goodwill, or whether it will be done against him. That it will be done in some manner or other is certain.

The days of suppression are over. They know it in every country where white and brown and yellow mingle. If the Pledged Allies are not disposed to let in light to their subject peoples and prepare for the days of world equality that are coming, the Germans will. If the Germans fail to be the most enslaving of people, they may become the most liberating. They will set themselves, with their characteristic thoroughness, to destroy that magic "prestige" which in Asia particularly is the clue to the miracle of European ascendancy. In the long run that may prove no ill service to mankind. The European must prepare to make himself acceptable in Asia, to state his case to Asia and be understood by Asia, or to leave Asia. That is the blunt reality of the Asiatic situation.

It has already been pointed out in these chapters that if the alliance of the Pledged Allies is indeed to be permanent, it implies something in the nature of a Zollverein, a common policy towards the rest of the world and an arrangement involving a common control over the dependencies of all the Allies. It will be interesting, now that we have sketched a possible map of Europe after the war, to look a little more closely into the nature of the "empires" concerned, and to attempt a few broad details of the probable map of the Eastern hemisphere outside Europe in the years immediately to come.

Now there are, roughly speaking, three types of overseas "possessions." They may be either (1) territory that was originally practically unoccupied and that was settled by the imperial people, or (2) territory

with a barbaric population having no national idea, or (3) conquered states. In the case of the British Empire all three are present; in the case of the French only the second and third; in the case of the Russian only the first and third. Each of these types must necessarily follow its own system of developments. Take first those territories originally but thinly occupied, or not occupied at all, of which all or at least the dominant element of the population is akin to that of the "home country." These used to be called by the British "colonies"--though the "colonies" of Greece and Rome were really only garrison cities settled in foreign lands--and they are now being rechristened "Dominions." Australia, for instance, is a British Dominion, and Siberia and most of Russia in Asia, a Russian Dominion. Their manifest destiny is for their children to become equal citizens with the cousins and brothers they have left at home.

There has been much discussion in England during the last decade upon some modification of the British legislature that would admit representatives from the Dominions to a proportional share in the government of the Empire. The problem has been complicated by the unsettled status of Ireland and the mischief-making Tories there, and by the perplexities arising out of those British dependencies of non-British race--the Indian states, for example, whose interests are sometimes in conflict with those of the Dominions.

The attractiveness of the idea of an Imperial legislature is chiefly on the surface, and I have very strong doubts of its realisability. These

Dominions seem rather to tend to become independent and distinct sovereign states in close and affectionate alliance with Great Britain, and having a common interest in the British Navy. In many ways the interests of the Dominions are more divergent from those of Great Britain than are Great Britain and Russia, or Great Britain and France. Many of the interests of Canada are more closely bound to those of the United States than they are to those of Australasia, in such a matter as the maintenance of the Monroe Principle, for example. South Africa again takes a line with regard to British Indian subjects which is highly embarrassing to Great Britain. There is a tendency in all the British colonies to read American books and periodicals rather than British, if for no other reason than because their common life, life in a newish and very democratic land, is much more American than British in character.

On the other hand, one must remember that Great Britain has European interests--the integrity of Holland and Belgium is a case in point--which are much closer to the interests of France than they are to those of the younger Britains beyond the seas. A voice in an Alliance that included France and the United States, and had its chief common interest in the control of the seas, may in the future seem far more desirable to these great and growing English-speaking Dominions than the sending of representatives to an Imperial House of Lords at Westminster, and the adornment of elderly colonial politicians with titles and decorations at Buckingham Palace.

I think Great Britain and her Allies have all of them to prepare their

minds for a certain release of their grip upon their "possessions," if they wish to build up a larger unity; I do not see that any secure unanimity of purpose is possible without such releases and readjustments.

Now the next class of foreign "possession" is that in which the French and Belgians and Italians are most interested. Britain also has possessions of this type in Central Africa and the less civilised districts of India, but Russia has scarcely anything of the sort. In this second class of possession the population is numerous, barbaric, and incapable of any large or enduring political structure, and over its destinies rule a small minority of European administrators.

The greatest of this series of possessions are those in black Africa. The French imagination has taken a very strong hold of the idea of a great French-speaking West and Central Africa, with which the ordinary British citizen will only too gladly see the conquered German colonies incorporated. The Italians have a parallel field of development in the hinterland of Tripoli. Side by side, France, Belgium and Italy, no longer troubled by hostile intrigues, may very well set themselves in the future to the task of building up a congenial Latin civilisation out of the tribal confusions of these vast regions. They will, I am convinced, do far better than the English in this domain. The English-speaking peoples have been perhaps the most successful settlers in the world; the United States and the Dominions are there to prove it; only the Russians in Siberia can compare with them; but as

administrators the British are a race coldly aloof. They have nothing to give a black people, and no disposition to give.

The Latin-speaking peoples, the Mediterranean nations, on the other hand, have proved to be the most successful assimilators of other races that mankind has ever known. Alexandre Dumas is not the least of the glories of France. In a hundred years' time black Africa, west of Tripoli, from Oran to Rhodesia, will, I believe, talk French. And what does not speak French will speak the closely related Italian. I do not see why this Latin black culture should not extend across equatorial Africa to meet the Indian influence at the coast, and reach out to join hands with Madagascar. I do not see why the British flag should be any impediment to the Latinisation of tropical Africa or to the natural extension of the French and Italian languages through Egypt. I guess, however, that it will be an Islamic and not a Christian cult that will be talking Italian and French. For the French-speaking civilisation will make roads not only for French, Belgians, and Italians, but for the Arabs whose religion and culture already lie like a net over black Africa. No other peoples and no other religion can so conveniently give the negro what is needed to bring him into the comity of civilised peoples....

A few words of digression upon the future of Islam may not be out of place here. The idea of a militant Christendom has vanished from the world. The last pretensions of Christian propaganda have been buried in the Balkan trenches. A unification of Africa under Latin auspices

carries with it now no threat of missionary invasion. Africa will be a fair field for all religions, and the religion to which the negro will take will be the religion that best suits his needs. That religion, we are told by nearly everyone who has a right to speak upon such questions, is Islam, and its natural propagandist is the Arab. There is no reason why he should not be a Frenchified Arab.

Both the French and the British have the strongest interest in the revival of Arabic culture. Let the German learn Turkish if it pleases him. Through all Africa and Western Asia there is a great to-morrow for a nascent Islam under Arab auspices. Constantinople, that venal city of the waterways, sitting like Asenath at the ford, has corrupted all who came to her; she has been the paralysis of Islam. But the Islam of the Turk is a different thing from the Islam of the Arab. That was one of the great progressive impulses in the world of men. It is our custom to underrate the Arab's contribution to civilisation quite absurdly in comparison with our debt to the Hebrew and Greek. It is to the initiatives of Islamic culture, for example, that we owe our numerals, the bulk of modern mathematics, and the science of chemistry. The British have already set themselves to the establishment of Islamic university teaching in Egypt, but that is the mere first stroke of the pick at the opening of the mine. English, French, Russian, Arabic, Hindustani, Spanish, Italian; these are the great world languages that most concern the future of civilisation from the point of view of the Peace Alliance that impends. No country can afford to neglect any of those languages, but as a matter of primary importance I would say, for

the British, Hindustani, for the Americans, Russian or Spanish, for the French and Belgians and Italians, Arabic. These are the directions in which the duty of understanding is most urgent for each of these peoples, and the path of opportunity plainest.

The disposition to underrate temporarily depressed nations, races, and cultures is a most irrational, prevalent, and mischievous form of stupidity. It distorts our entire outlook towards the future. The British reader can see its absurdity most easily when he reads the ravings of some patriotic German upon the superiority of the "Teuton" over the Italians and Greeks--to whom we owe most things of importance in European civilisation. Equally silly stuff is still to be read in British and American books about "Asiatics." And was there not some fearful rubbish, not only in German but in English and French, about the "decadence" of France? But we are learning--rapidly. When I was a student in London thirty years ago we regarded Japan as a fantastic joke; the comic opera, *The Mikado*, still preserves that foolish phase for the admiration of posterity. And to-day there is a quite unjustifiable tendency to ignore the quality of the Arab and of his religion. Islam is an open-air religion, noble and simple in its broad conceptions; it is none the less vital from Nigeria to China because it has sickened in the closeness of Constantinople. The French, the Italians, the British have to reckon with Islam and the Arab; where the continental deserts are, there the Arabs are and there is Islam; their culture will never be destroyed and replaced over these regions by Europeanism. The Allies who prepare the Peace of the World have to make

their peace with that. And when I foreshadow this necessary liaison of the French and Arabic cultures, I am thinking not only of the Arab that is, but of the Arab that is to come. The whole trend of events in Asia Minor, the breaking up and decapitation of the Ottoman Empire and the Euphrates invasion, points to a great revival of Mesopotamia--at first under European direction. The vast system of irrigation that was destroyed by the Mongol armies of Hulugu in the thirteenth century will be restored; the desert will again become populous. But the local type will prevail. The new population of Mesopotamia will be neither European nor Indian; it will be Arabic; and with its concentration Arabic will lay hold of the printing press. A new intellectual movement in Islam, a renascent Bagdad, is as inevitable as is 1950.

I have, however, gone a little beyond the discussion of the future of the barbaric possessions in these anticipations of an Arabic co-operation with the Latin peoples in the reconstruction of Western Asia and the barbaric regions of north and central Africa. But regions of administered barbarism occur not only in Africa. The point is that they are administered, and that their economic development is very largely in the hands, and will for many generations remain in the hands, of the possessing country. Hitherto their administration has been in the interests of the possessing nation alone. Their acquisition has been a matter of bitter rivalries, their continued administration upon exclusive lines is bound to lead to dangerous clashings. The common sense of the situation points to a policy of give and take, in which throughout the possessions of all the Pledged Allies, the citizens of

all will have more or less equal civil advantages. And this means some consolidation of the general control of those Administered Territories. I have already hinted at the possibility that the now exclusively British navy may some day be a world-navy controlled by an Admiralty representing a group of allies, Australasia, Canada, Britain and, it may be, France and Russia and the United States. To those who know how detached the British Admiralty is at the present time from the general methods of British political life, there will be nothing strange in this idea of its completer detachment. Its personnel does to a large extent constitute a class apart. It takes its boys out of the general life very often before they have got to their fourteenth birthday. It is not so closely linked up with specific British social elements, with political parties and the general educational system, as are the rest of the national services.

There is nothing so very fantastic in this idea of a sort of World-Admiralty; it is not even completely novel. Such bodies as the Knights Templars transcended nationality in the Middle Ages. I do not see how some such synthetic control of the seas is to be avoided in the future. And now coming back to the "White Man's Burthen," is there not a possibility that such a board of marine and international control as the naval and international problems of the future may produce (or some closely parallel body with a stronger Latin element), would also be capable of dealing with these barbaric "Administered Territories"? A day may come when Tripoli, Nigeria, the French and the Belgian Congo will be all under one supreme control. We may be laying the foundations of such

a system to-day unawares. The unstable and fluctuating conferences of the Allies to-day, their repeated experiences of the disadvantages of evanescent and discontinuous co-ordinations, may press them almost unconsciously toward this building up of things greater than they know.

We come now to the third and most difficult type of overseas "possessions." These are the annexed or conquered regions with settled populations already having a national tradition and culture of their own. They are, to put it bluntly, the suppressed, the overlaid, nations. Now I am a writer rather prejudiced against the idea of nationality; my habit of thought is cosmopolitan; I hate and despise a shrewish suspicion of foreigners and foreign ways; a man who can look me in the face, laugh with me, speak truth and deal fairly, is my brother though his skin is as black as ink or as yellow as an evening primrose. But I have to recognise the facts of the case. In spite of all my large liberality, I find it less irritating to be ruled by people of my own language and race and tradition, and I perceive that for the mass of people alien rule is intolerable.

Local difference, nationality, is a very obstinate thing. Every country tends to revert to its natural type. Nationality will out. Once a people has emerged above the barbaric stage to a national consciousness, that consciousness will endure. There is practically always going to be an Egypt, a Poland, an Armenia. There is no Indian nation, there never has been, but there are manifestly a Bengal and a Rajputana, there is manifestly a constellation of civilised nations in India. Several of

these have literatures and traditions that extend back before the days when the Britons painted themselves with woad. Let us deal with this question mainly with reference to India. What is said will apply equally to Burmah or Egypt or Armenia or--to come back into Europe--Poland.

Now I have talked, I suppose, with many scores of people about the future of India, and I have never yet met anyone, Indian or British, who thought it desirable that the British should evacuate India at once. And I have never yet met anyone who did not think that ultimately the British must let the Indian nations control their own destinies. There are really not two opposite opinions about the destiny of India, but only differences of opinion as to the length of time in which that destiny is to be achieved. Many Indians think (and I agree with them) that India might be a confederation of sovereign states in close alliance with the British Empire and its allies within the space of fifty years or so. The opposite extreme was expressed by an old weary Indian administrator who told me, "Perhaps they may begin to be capable of self-government in four or five hundred years." These are the extreme Liberal and the extreme Tory positions in this question. It is a choice between decades and centuries. There is no denial of the inevitability of ultimate restoration. No one of any experience believes the British administration in India is an eternal institution.

There is a great deal of cant in this matter in Great Britain. Genteel English people with relations in the Indian Civil Service and habits of

self-delusion, believe that Indians are "grateful" for British rule. The sort of "patriotic" self-flattery that prevailed in the Victorian age, and which is so closely akin to contemporary German follies, fostered and cultivated this sweet delusion. There are, no doubt, old ladies in Germany to-day who believe that Belgium will presently be "grateful" for the present German administration. Let us clear our minds of such cant. As a matter of fact no Indians really like British rule or think of it as anything better than a necessary, temporary evil. Let me put the parallel case to an Englishman or a Frenchman. Through various political ineptitudes our country has, we will suppose, fallen under the rule of the Chinese. They administer it, we will further assume, with an efficiency and honesty unparalleled in the bad old times of our lawyer politicians. They do not admit us to the higher branches of the administration; they go about our country wearing a strange costume, professing a strange religion--which implies that ours is wrong--speaking an unfamiliar tongue. They control our financial system and our economic development--on Chinese lines of the highest merit. They take the utmost care of our Gothic cathedrals for us. They put our dearest racial possessions into museums and admire them very much indeed. They teach our young men to fly kites and eat bird's nest soup. They do all that a well-bred people can do to conceal their habit and persuasion of a racial superiority. But they keep up their "prestige." ... You know, we shouldn't love them. It really isn't a question of whether they rule well or ill, but that the position is against certain fundamentals of human nature. The only possible footing upon which we could meet them with comfortable minds would be the footing that we and

they were discussing the terms of the restoration of our country. Then indeed we might almost feel friendly with them. That is the case with all civilised "possessions." The only terms upon which educated British and Indians can meet to-day with any comfort is precisely that. The living intercourse of the British and Indian mind to-day is the discussion of the restoration. Everything else is humbug on the one side and self-deception on the other.

It is idle to speak of the British occupation of India as a conquest or a robbery. It is a fashion of much "advanced" literature in Europe to assume that the European rule of various Asiatic countries is the result of deliberate conquest with a view to spoliation. But that is only the ugly side of the facts. Cases of the deliberate invasion and spoliation of one country by another have been very rare in the history of the last three centuries. There has always been an excuse, and there has always been a percentage of truth in the excuse. The history of every country contains phases of political ineptitude in which that country becomes so misgoverned as to be not only a nuisance to the foreigner within its borders but a danger to its neighbours. Mexico is in such a phase to-day. And most of the aggressions and annexations of the modern period have arisen out of the inconveniences and reasonable fears caused by such an inept phase. I am a persistent advocate for the restoration of Poland, but at the same time it is very plain to me that it is a mere travesty of the facts to say that Poland, was a white lamb of a country torn to pieces by three wicked neighbours, Poland in the eighteenth century was a dangerous political muddle, uncertain of her

monarchy, her policy, her affinities. She endangered her neighbours because there was no guarantee that she might not fall under the tutelage of one of them and become a weapon against the others.

The division of Poland was an outrage upon the Polish people, but it was largely dictated by an entirely honest desire to settle a dangerous possibility. It seemed less injurious than the possibility of a vacillating, independent Poland playing off one neighbour against another. That possibility will still be present in the minds of the diplomatists who will determine the settlement after the war. Until the Poles make up their minds, and either convince the Russians that they are on the side of Russia and Bohemia against Germany for evermore, or the Germans that they are willing to be Posenised, they will live between two distrustful enemies.

The Poles need to think of the future more and the wrongs of Poland less. They want less patriotic intrigue and more racial self-respect. They are not only Poles but members of a greater brotherhood. My impression is that Poland will "go Slav"--in spite of Cracow. But I am not sure. I am haunted by the fear that Poland may still find her future hampered by Poles who are, as people say, "too clever by half." An incalculable Poland cannot be and will not be tolerated by the rest of Europe.

And the overspreading of India by the British was in the same way very clearly done under compulsion, first lest the Dutch or French should

exploit the vast resources of the peninsula against Britain, and then for fear of a Russian exploitation. I am no apologist for British rule in India; I think we have neglected vast opportunities there; it was our business from the outset to build up a free and friendly Indian confederation, and we have done not a tithe of what we might have done to that end. But then we have not done a little of what we might have done for our own country.

Nevertheless we have our case to plead, not only for going to India but--with the Berlin papers still babbling of Bagdad and beyond[3]--of sticking there very grimly. And so too the British have a fairly sound excuse for grabbing Egypt in their fear lest in its phase of political ineptitude it should be the means of strangling the British Empire as the Turk in Constantinople has been used to strangle the Russian. None of these justifications I admit are complete, but all deserve consideration. It is no good arguing about the finer ethics of the things that are; the business of sane men is to get things better. The business of all sane men in all the countries of the Pledged Allies and in America is manifestly to sink petty jealousies and a suicidal competitiveness, and to organise co-operation with all the intellectual forces they can find or develop in the subject countries, to convert these inept national systems into politically efficient independent organisations in a world peace alliance. If we fail to do that, then all the inept states and all the subject states about the world will become one great field for the sowing of tares by the enemy.

[Footnote 3: This was written late in February, 1916.]

So that with regard to the civilised just as with regard to the barbaric regions of the "possessions" of the European-centred empires, we come to the same conclusion. That on the whole the path of safety lies in the direction of pooling them and of declaring a common policy of progressive development leading to equality. The pattern of the United States, in which the procedure is first the annexation of "territories" and then their elevation to the rank of "States," must, with of course far more difficulty and complication, be the pattern for the "empires" of to-day--so far as they are regions of alien population. The path of the Dominions, settled by emigrants akin to the home population, Siberia, Canada, and so forth, to equal citizenship with the people of the Mother Country is by comparison simple and plain.

And so the discussion of the future of the overseas "empires" brings us again to the same realisation to which the discussion of nearly every great issue arising out of this war has pointed, the realisation of the imperative necessity of some great council or conference, some permanent overriding body, call it what you will, that will deal with things more broadly than any "nationalism" or "patriotic imperialism" can possibly do. That body must come into human affairs. Upon the courage and imagination of living statesmen it depends whether it will come simply and directly into concrete reality or whether it will materialise slowly through, it may be, centuries of blood and blundering from such phantom anticipations as this, anticipations that now haunt the thoughts of all

politically-minded men.