Much of what we now call Imperialism—the fine creed of union and coöperation from continent to continent—had its origin in the jingling guineas at the bottom of the breeches-pockets of the London merchants. Some of it perhaps even to-day is tainted by its original sin.

The North American colonies grew. Their protection became increasingly difficult. It involved a half century of conflict before the final overthrow of the French. It created in England a national debt, a thing unknown when the conflict began, that amounted in 1763 to 132 million pounds sterling. The debt looked ominous. In the light of the finance of the day it foreshadowed national bankruptcy. Meantime the colonial territory that now stretches from the Arctic Ocean to Florida, contained some two and-a-half millions of souls, owning some half a million slaves. The British government turned to colonial support as a means of facing the growing burden of common defence. They proposed to raise taxes in America—stamp taxes, tea taxes, and the like—to defray the cost of the king's forces in America. They did not propose that the colonies should have the remotest control of raising or expending the money or directing the fleets and armies for which it paid. The colonial temper took fright at this. Patrick Henry of Virginia said that it looked like slavery. As a slave-holder, he had every reason to know. The quarrel lasted nearly twenty years. Deep called unto deep,—the depth of aristocratic stupidity matched against the depth of colonial selfishness. No means of solution could be found. Here and there a few theorists proposed a common defence and a common government. This was thought impossible. Perhaps it was. Those, be it remembered, were the days of infinite distance. Even between Liverpool and London the royal mail was very conveniently carried in the saddle bags of a single rider. At any rate the quarrel went from bad to worse. It presently led to fighting. A farmers' crusade, musket in hand, laid siege to Boston. George Washington, a particularly loyal British subject, took command. Benjamin