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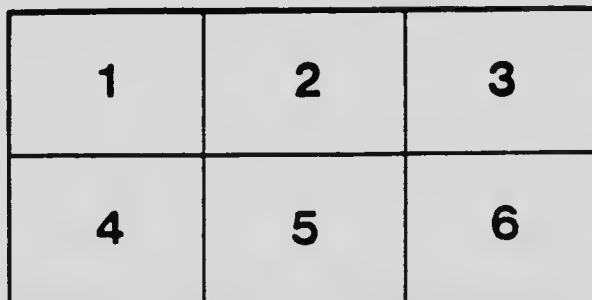
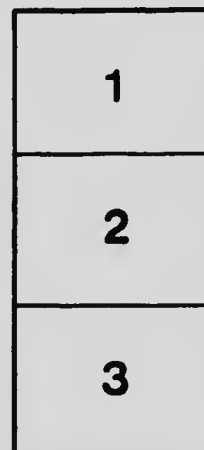
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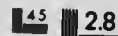
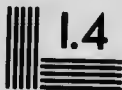
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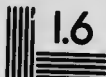
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IS THE BRITISH EMPIRE
THE RESULT OF
WHOLESALE ROBBERY?

BY

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DEPT PROFESSOR OF COLONIAL HISTORY

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IS THE BRITISH EMPIRE THE RESULT OF WHOLESALE ROBBERY?

AMONG the charges which the peace-loving and humanitarian Teuton hurls against his backsliding British cousin is the assertion that Great Britain has owed its empire to the practise of the most wholesale robbery, the suggestion being that a Power whose hands are so foul can hardly pose as the champion of public rights or of the sanctity of treaties. It has, therefore, seemed worth while to devote a few pages to the actual historical facts with regard to the growth of the British Empire.

The subject is a complex one, and does not readily lend itself to facile generalization; but from a close inspection certain general conclusions seem to emerge. If we were German philosophers we might say with Herr Neuman, a Radical, according to *The Times*, of high character and repute, that wars in the past, no less than to-day, involved 'changes of organization in the process of human evolution', and that the British Empire was the outcome of such a change; but, being mere empiricists, we prefer to deal with the facts of the case.

It is impossible, however, to ignore certain broad principles underlying the facts. It seems a law of life that, when a nation has reached a certain stage of internal development, it finds in overseas expansion

a natural and healthy outlet for its superabundant energies ; and we in England have never denied the natural and, indeed, inevitable character of the claim of the new German Empire that it too should find its place in the sun of overseas expansion ; though, if it has found the best spots of the earth already occupied, that is Germany's misfortune, and not Great Britain's fault.

In any case, when the British Empire was being founded, the one enemy was Spain, and we may freely admit that if England did not succeed in snatching Spanish possessions, it was her poverty and not her will which was at fault. Spain, to our ancestors, represented the Scarlet Woman of the Apocalypse ; and any measures taken against her would have seemed justified to the half-buccaneering, half-religious, temper of the time.

But the Spanish power, though on the wane, was still too strong for a frontal attack ; and so the English colonial Empire began in a quarter where, owing to the absence of the precious metals, Spain had not attempted to effect an occupation. Whether we say that the British colonial Empire began with Newfoundland, over which in fact territorial sovereignty was not made good till very many years after the formal annexation by Sir Humphrey Gilbert, or with the foundation of Virginia in 1607, it is equally false to suggest that our Empire took its rise in violence. What happened was peaceful occupation of, apparently, vacant lands ; though afterwards, no doubt, trouble sometimes arose from the neighbourhood of aboriginal Indians. The most sensitive Teutonic conscience, however, could scarcely require that the vast continent of North America should have remained permanently

unoccupied, so as to furnish hunting-grounds for a few scattered Indian tribes.

Of the thirteen colonies that formed the original United States, there was only one which owed its origin to capture. That the American colonies developed as they did, in the difficult circumstances of the seventeenth century, was mainly due to political and religious reasons. New England owed its existence and its rapid growth to the use of colonies as safety-valves for religious dissent, when the Church of England was predominant at home. Similarly Virginia received a large influx of population when the Royalist party in England found themselves worsted. Again, a peace-loving Quaker founded the 'holy experiment' of Pennsylvania; and the later colony of Georgia was started on philanthropic lines, as a home for impoverished debtors.

Enough has perhaps been said to show the general character of the first British colonial Empire; but it has been already admitted that there was one exception, and that exception we have no desire to shirk. It is true that New Netherland was, in a time of apparent peace, calmly taken by England. Historians differ as to the amount of moral turpitude involved. Economic causes had brought it about that the United Netherlands had succeeded to Spain as the enemy to be feared. There had been already war between the two countries; and its close had brought no permanent peace. Relations with Spain had accustomed men to sporadic hostile proceedings in the far seas, even when peace prevailed in Europe. The English Navigation Laws, which were enacted in the interests of the English shipbuilder and merchant, were meaningless so long as

Dutch shipping had a legitimate *point d'appui* in the very centre of the English colonial system. It has further been pointed out that the Dutch were making attacks upon English forts in West Africa; so that the moment was not one of complete peace. Still, whatever excuses may be offered, the transaction was not one of which Englishmen have reason to be proud; English diplomatic action at the Hague can best be described by saying that it resembled German diplomatic action at Brussels before the violation of Belgian neutrality. In theory, English statesmen had always maintained that the Dutch were trespassers in a part of North America included in the English claim; and so, when the Dutch protested against the capture of New Netherland by force, the English ambassador arrogantly replied that 'the king did not look upon himself as obliged to give any account of what he did in relation thereunto . . . no more than he should think himself obliged . . . to have their consent in case he should think fit to proceed against the Dutch that live in the Fens in England'. But, whatever were the faults of the original proceedings, there can be no doubt as to the wisdom of English action afterwards. The conditions granted upon the surrender have been termed 'the most favourable ever granted by a conqueror'. The new English governor organized the government with an almost imperceptible interruption of the past state of affairs. The day after the surrender the local municipal bodies assembled and transacted business as though nothing had occurred. Most of the Dutch inhabitants came forward and took the oath of allegiance to their new sovereign, continuing almost undisturbed in their daily pursuits. The rule of the

Dutch West India Company had been wanting in tact or sympathy; and, though a representative assembly was not at the time set on foot, the Dutch inhabitants seem to have acquiesced cheerfully in the new situation, and to have had no scruples in becoming, almost at once, good English subjects. An American historian writes: 'Putting aside the methods employed, the acquisition of New Netherland was by all means the wisest and most beneficial act of colonial administration performed in this period. . . . By the reduction of the Dutch, the English colonial possessions were territorially rounded up and brought into continuous contact with one another, and the monopoly of colonial trade, then so much sought after, could, it was thought, be more easily enforced now that there were no foreign ports in the midst of the colonies. The object was entirely in accord with the economic theory of the times and the *practice of other nations*, and the English ministers were justified in their desire to bring it about, if not in the means by which they accomplished it.'

After all, for us now, the practical question is not how our remote ancestors acquired this territory, but the actual use that was made of it, when acquired. Here we can claim a record which no hostile criticism can upset. Take as a crucial example this colony of New York. Started as we have seen by wrongdoing, one would naturally, therefore, expect it to be a vulnerable spot. It is surely, then, significant that at the time of the American Revolution, when, for reasons too complex and involved to be entered upon here, the first English colonial Empire was broken in pieces, the province, where the loyalists were the most numerous, and which longest clung to the Imperial connexion, was the one

province which owed its origin to foreign settlement. When we compare the political assimilation of the Dutch in New York to the English system with the manner in which men originally of German stock, and whose ancestors were part of the German Empire, have refused to accept the beliefs and ideals of modern Germany, we may well ask whether Germans would not be better employed in examining the nature of their own political system, than in casting stones at us for the way in which our Empire was acquired.

It is hard for us now to realize that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the West India Islands appeared, from the point of view of the colonial system, of greater importance than were the continental colonies. Jamaica, the largest English possession in this quarter, was won from Spain as compensation for the failure of the English expedition against Hispaniola; but Barbados and other English islands owed their origin as parts of the Empire to peaceful occupation by settlers; and though in the eighteenth century islands changed hands according to the issue of wars, there is nothing in the English record to show that, in this part of the world at any rate, England was at all more grasping than her neighbours.

At the close of the seventeenth century the scene had shifted; and henceforth, for more than half a century, the conflict was between England and France for hegemony in North America. In this conflict it is impossible to deny that France was the aggressor. Like others after him, Louis XIV aimed at securing for France pre-eminence both on the continent of Europe and overseas. The French of New France were numerically very inferior to their southern neighbours; and, from

a military standpoint, it was no doubt true that only a bold offensive could make up for the lack of population. When we consider the respective populations of the French and of the English colonies, the wonder is not that the English finally prevailed, but that success was so long delayed, and that so often it looked as if, in spite of their inferiority in numbers, the French would yet gain the day. Be this as it may, the French, having deliberately chosen to be the aggressors, could not complain if, by the arbitrament of war, they found themselves gradually stripped of their American possessions. Acadia or Nova Scotia was the first province to be lost under the terms of the Peace of Utrecht; and the true charge that can be brought against the English is, not that they annexed a province which had been a continual menace to New England in the hands of their adversaries, and to which they had in the past set up claims, however shadowy, but that having annexed it they did little or nothing to make their occupation effective. The banishment of the Acadians in 1755, of which Longfellow has written, though at best a bad business, was, perhaps, rendered necessary by the shirking of responsibilities by successive generations.

So far from Great Britain having shown extreme greed in the eighteenth century in extending her Empire, her action, at each settlement of claims, was so moderate as to give the Opposition in Parliament the excuse for crying out that the interests of the country were being betrayed. The same fault was found with the Peace of Utrecht and with the Treaty of Paris of 1763. The restoration of Cape Breton to France, by the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, in exchange for Madras, gave

grave offence to the New England colonies, and was a contributing cause to the estrangement which arose between the Americans and the Mother Country. Owing to the influence of sea-power it is an undoubted fact that Great Britain acquired a giant's strength by the close of the Seven Years' War. Granted her opportunities, it cannot be shown that she used them inordinately. It is true that Canada became British by conquest; but it must be remembered that French Canada was for practical purposes only a portion of the present province of Quebec, and that none of the seven other provinces (besides Nova Scotia and Quebec), of which the Dominion consists, owed their origin in any way to war or conquest. Ontario, or Upper Canada, as it was then called, and New Brunswick, owed their existence to the presence of American loyalists, men who faced ruin and exile that they might maintain loyalty to their King and Empire. Prince Edward Island, though it had been part of the French province, only became a living community after the British conquest. The western provinces, British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, took their rise in circumstances very different from those of warfare, unless indeed we can speak of a war with the wilderness. But even confining our attention to French Canada, there has been nothing in its history as a British possession that calls for serious complaint. From the moment of its acquisition it was sought, by careful consideration of French laws and customs, to secure the loyalty and affection of the new subjects. Mistakes were, no doubt, made. The grant of a representative assembly in 1791 to a population untrained in local self-government was a doubtful blessing, and want of tact on the part

of British Governors, coupled with want of moderation on the part of French politicians, brought about a political deadlock which ended in an abortive rebellion. But, at the worst, the French Canadians had no deep-seated feelings of resentment. In 1775 they had, with a few exceptions, turned a deaf ear to the voice of the American charmer ; and when once, under responsible government, they were allowed a fair share in the management of their own affairs, they showed themselves as loyal to the British Empire as were their Anglo-Saxon fellow-subjects. France has forgiven the loss of French Canada ; the French Canadians, in spite of occasional grievances, such as none of us is without, are a prosperous and contented people, and have no wish for the sympathy or crocodile's tears of the proved enemies of the cause they hold most dear, the maintenance of separate nationalism within a political union.

Though it is difficult to judge in one's own cause, the plain facts surely disclose the singular moderation of the British Government in the matter of colonial annexations after the overthrow of Napoleon. This moderation must not be put down to any notions of altruistic morality. The truth was that the loss of the American colonies had, for the time, killed enthusiasm for colonial expansion of the old type ; and a Government of aristocratic sympathies and prejudices was not quick to recognize the importance of tropical possessions for the new industrialism which was rapidly developing. Under the Treaty of Paris of 1814, Great Britain ceded all the West Indian Islands which she had conquered from France, with the exception of Tobago and St. Lucia (Trinidad was also retained,

but this had been a Spanish possession). In explaining and justifying the treaty, Lord Castlereagh, the British Minister for Foreign Affairs, affirmed that it was expedient freely to open to France the means of peaceful occupation, and that it was not the interest of this country to make her a military and conquering, instead of a commercial and pacific nation. From the point of view of students of world-empire such a remark sounds singularly fatuous; but it shows that a British Minister, whom modern historians are inclined to regard as the best War Minister of his day, was not only far from desiring to apply to their extreme the consequences resulting from sea-power, but apparently refrained from considering. When conquered colonies were retained, it was as a defensive measure, to prevent aggression. Thus Mauritius remained British not because of its own intrinsic importance, but because of its harbour and of the mischief it had caused when in the hands of France. In the same spirit Lord Castlereagh maintained, with regard to the Newfoundland fisheries, that it would have been 'invidious and would only have excited a feeling of jealousy to have tried to exclude France from the share in that fishery which had been secured to her by her two preceding treaties with Great Britain'.

As a further illustration of the argument, take the treatment accorded to the Dutch colonies after the peace. It is true that Cape Colony, which had been restored to Holland at the Peace of Amiens, was finally retained by Great Britain. The following very general account of the complicated transaction which ended in the English keeping the Cape is quoted from a work of authority. 'On March 13, 1813, the British Govern-

ment made a treaty with the Swedish Government agreeing to transfer to Sweden the West Indian island of Guadeloupe, which the English had taken from the French, in consideration of certain trading privileges to be given to British ships in specified Swedish ports. In the following year, however, by the general Peace of Paris, signed on May 30, 1814, it was agreed that Guadeloupe should be given back to France. Compensation was due to Sweden, and it was agreed that such compensation to the amount of one million sterling should be made good by Holland out of her colonies, then in possession of the English, in consideration of the incorporation of the Belgic provinces with Holland. This compensation Great Britain agreed to pay on behalf of Holland, and in addition, to advance two millions sterling towards improving the defences of the Netherlands; and to bear further charges, not exceeding three millions sterling, towards the general expenses of setting up the new Dutch-Belgian kingdom. In return, the Cape, and what is now British Guiana, were finally ceded to Great Britain, being practically bought for the sum of six millions.' Whatever be thought of the wisdom of this transaction—and the subsequent history showed that the hasty transference of the Belgic provinces to Holland was mistaken and ill-advised—it cannot be said that, considering the necessity of the Cape Colony to Great Britain as a half-way house to India, this annexation can be cited as an example of the arrogant insolence of the robber State in despoiling its weaker neighbours. Even more significant is the case of Java. In the first quarter of the seventeenth century the English East India Company, of which a word will be said later in another connexion, made

efforts to obtain an equal footing with its great Dutch rival in Java and the Spice Islands. These efforts proving unsuccessful, the English were compelled, practically, to confine themselves to the trade of continental India. The Napoleonic Wars gave the opportunity to alter this state of things. The Java expedition of 1811 was a perfectly legitimate warlike operation, necessitated by French aggression. Java was occupied with little trouble, and an English Governor was appointed who is now generally recognized as one of the most distinguished builders of Greater Britain. During the four years Sir Stamford Raffles remained in office he laboured strenuously on behalf of the people entrusted to him. The government of the Dutch Company had been, it is generally admitted, very inefficient; and, though with the fall of the Company at the time of the French Revolution an improvement had been made, there had not been time for the changes to produce much result. Raffles recognized that Java might become another India. He was keenly interested in its welfare and development; and, though his sanguine and eager nature may have exaggerated the value of the measures he took—improvements on paper which required for their working a greater number of European officials than were at his disposal—undoubtedly he did a great work, considering the shortness of his period of rule. The restoration of Java to the Dutch was doubtless a measure both of political justice and expediency. It would have been idle to expect from Holland feelings of friendship, if the jewel of its Eastern possessions had not again been placed in its hands. Nevertheless, a robber State, such as we read of in German invectives, would not have allowed so valuable

a prize, when once within its clutches, to escape from its power. The subsequent peaceful occupation of the port of Singapore was not, in its direct results, compensation for the loss of Java.

Returning to Africa, what strikes the student, if he attempts to follow the course of British colonial policy during the nineteenth century, is its uncertain and fluctuating character. In Cape Colony the Dutch became discontented, not so much because they were at issue with British methods of government as because the missionary influence, which was strong with the Home Government, caused a treatment of the native question which seemed the height of folly to the Dutch mind. The 'trek' of the Dutch farmers, which gave birth to the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, owed its origin to this cause. The British Government attempted to maintain an impossible position. They held that the farmers, who had 'trekked', remained British subjects, yet they were not willing to assume the responsibility of governing the new settlements. No wonder that the Boers were puzzled and soured by the attitude of the British authorities, and that what was really hesitation and uncertainty should seem to foreign critics mere Machiavellian hypocrisy. In fact, cross currents were at work. The British officials on the spot recognized, for the most part, the necessity of a policy of expansion, in view of possible dangers from native risings. The Home Government, on the other hand, which had to find the money for what was done, not unnaturally desired to restrict, so far as possible, the sphere of Imperial obligations. For either policy there was something to be said; what was indefensible was a policy of see-saw, which advanced only to recede,

and then once again advanced when the circumstances had become more difficult. With the details of this unfortunate chapter in our colonial policy we are not here concerned; but whatever were the blunders and misfeasances of British statesmanship, at least those blunders and misfeasances showed that it was not actuated by a fierce greed of empire.

The same conclusion can be drawn from the history of other parts of Africa. Although there were British settlements along the coast of West Africa in 1865, the spirit of the time was expressed in the Report of a Select Parliamentary Committee, which advised in that year

‘ That all further extension of territory or assumption of government or new treaties offering any protection to native tribes would be inexpedient, and that the object of our policy should be to encourage in the natives the exercise of those qualities, which may render it possible for us more and more to transfer to them the administration of all the governments with a view to an ultimate withdrawal from all except, probably, Sierra Leone ’.

No doubt to German critics this Report will seem only a further instance of English duplicity and cunning; but we, who know England, know very well how strong was the public opinion which it represented. But, it may fairly be asked, if this was so, why has the result proved so different from what had been thus foreshadowed? The answer is a double one, depending upon two wholly different reasons. In the first place, it proved altogether impossible to act as the Report suggested. The effect of contact with European civilization is to undermine the foundations of the native system of government, and to produce a state of anarchy which necessitates further intervention. Take

as a crucial example the case of the Gold Coast. This colony had behind it the strong native kingdom of Ashantee. It became necessary to punish the aggressions of the Ashantee king, whose power was broken in 1874. The intention at the time was, after punishing the Ashantees, to leave their kingdom undisturbed. In fact, however, the destruction of their capital was followed by the defection of several of the outlying provinces, which it became necessary to absorb in the British Protectorate. The weakness and the scandalous character of what remained of the Ashantee kingdom led, in 1896, to its being formally annexed to the British Empire. The collapse of the Ashantee kingdom is a conspicuous instance ; but this is not the only region in which the breaking up of the native tribal system and the resulting anarchy have been important factors in the progress of expansion.

It would, however, be idle to deny that another influence has been at work making for the enlargement of our African Empire. British statesmen, content with what Great Britain already possessed, showed a curious lack of imagination in apprehending the natural ambitions of other nations. But, when it was realized that there was to be a scramble for the portions of Africa not already appropriated, the British, who had been pioneers in the work of colonial expansion, once more showed that they did not mean to be left behind in the race. Mr. Scott Keltie, in his admirable work on *The Partition of Africa*, gives two maps, the one of Africa showing European possessions before the Berlin Conference of 1885, and another showing its political divisions in 1895, which bring out the facts more than pages of comment. Whereas at the earlier date, European

possessions for the most part were confined to a fringe of coast, at the later, Africa is carved out amongst the European Powers. No doubt the appearance of Germany upon the scene, as a colonial Power, was a main contributing cause to this forcing of the pace. Unhappily, there was mutual misunderstanding between England and Germany on colonial questions.

The British Colonial Secretary was at the time Lord Granville, one of the most able and most convinced adherents of what is known as the 'Little England' faction. In 1873 he had written to the British Ambassador at Berlin that he did not feel 'the slightest jealousy of the Germans acquiring colonial possessions'; and that nothing seemed more improbable than that any substantial difference of opinion should arise on these questions between Great Britain and Germany. When, therefore, the hands of the Home Government were forced by men on the spot, who did not mean that Great Britain should be crowded out of her share, Germany may well have considered that she had been somehow deceived. On the other hand, Bismarck had told the same Ambassador at the same date that he desired neither colonies nor fleets. 'Colonies, in his opinion, would only be a cause of weakness'; and, therefore, when some ten years later a policy of German colonial expansion was entered upon, it came in the nature of a surprise to British statesmen. Moreover, the manner of its inception was not such as to win British favour to German enterprise. The British Foreign Office was informed that the German Consul-General, Dr. Naechtigal, had been commissioned 'to visit the west coast of Africa in order to complete the information now in the possession of the

Foreign Office at Berlin on the state of German commerce on the coast. He will put himself into communication with the authorities in the English possessions on the said coast, and is authorized to conduct, on behalf of the Imperial Government, negotiations connected with certain questions'. After this it is only natural that the annexation of Togoland and the Cameroons by this Dr. Nachtigal should have occasioned some resentment as well as surprise; and that it should have been followed by British annexation of the Oil Rivers and the mouth of the Niger. Mr. Scott Keltie comments :

'There was naturally jubilation in Germany over the success of the smart policy of Bismarck, while in England reproaches were freely heaped upon the Ministers of the time for their blindness. . . . Lord Granville naïvely reproached Prince Bismarck for intentionally misleading him . . . while Bismarck taunted Granville for his want of penetration, and maintained that his little ruse was altogether justifiable.'

Less open to criticism was the action of Germany in the same year in annexing Damaraland and Namaqualand (the present colony of South-West Africa). In this case both the British and the Cape Colony Governments had received a warning, though the nature of that warning had been such as to lull their suspicion. Still they had taken up the indefensible position that it was possible to refuse to incur responsibilities and yet to prevent others from entering upon the task.

But though we have no right to complain of the annexation of South-West Africa, neither have the Germans cause for grumbling if their presence in this part of the world militated in favour of a forward policy in British South Africa :

'The Bay of St. Lucia [writes Lord Fitzmaurice, Lord Granville's biographer] on the coast of Zululand, was considered at the time to be nearly the only good harbour, besides Delagoa Bay, which belonged to the Portuguese. It was also intended to be a possible terminus of a future line of railway from the Transvaal to the coast. The watchful eye of Herr Lüderitz (the founder of German South-West Africa) had for some time past been fixed on the spot. . . . And little doubt existed that communications were being carried on at this time with emissaries of the Transvaal Republic, which diplomatically could not be avowed. But the scheme of a German annexation leaked out, and, at the end of 1884, the British flag was hoisted at St. Lucia Bay.'

At the same time the westward extension of the Transvaal was blocked by the annexation of Bechuanaland; whilst the charter of the United South Africa Company in 1885 secured for the Empire what is now Rhodesia.

Turning to East Africa, whilst it is true that Germany by her action in 1885 stole a march upon Great Britain, we need not therefore grudge her the colony then acquired. It would seem that the extreme complacency shown by Lord Granville to German claims helped to bring about a friendly arrangement by which British East Africa and Uganda were recognized as British. If these possessions are likely to prove more valuable than the German, Germany has assuredly no cause for complaint; because, in effect, the British took her leavings.

It was natural that, where national rivalry and competition were at work, there should be some ill-feeling; but assuredly there was, neither at home nor in our colonies, any special desire to thwart Germany. So

long as French expansion was confined to the north, with a view to connecting the Senegal with the hinterland of Algeria, the British saw no reason to object. But, when the region of the Niger was in question, French claims were as resolutely opposed as were those of Germany in any part of the world. It may be annoying to foreign observers to find that at this critical time, when (according to their fine theories) the British race should have shown its decadence, strong men such as Sir W. Mackinnon in East Africa, Sir George Taubman Goldie in the region of the Niger, and Cecil Rhodes in South Africa, in spite of some apathy in Great Britain, succeeded in holding their own in the struggle for the partition of Africa; but that is no reason why the British should be blamed for behaving precisely in the same way as other nations. In fact, relations with Germany over a colonial question never became so critical as they were with France when, on the reconquest of the Sudan, Lord Kitchener found himself confronted at Fashoda with the French flag. France, at the present time, owes Great Britain no grudge because, sooner than risk the possession of the upper waters of the Nile falling into foreign hands, we were prepared to go to war. What reason is there why Germany should brood over past transactions in which, in point of fact, she was as successful as her rivals?

It must always be remembered that—though a later generation, taught by Treitschke and adopting his doctrine, has come to believe in world-empire and maritime supremacy as Germany's sacred mission—at the time of the starting of her existing colonial Empire, colonial questions were mainly regarded by Bismarck as pawns in the political game between the rival Powers

Profoundly sceptical (as we have seen) as late as 1873, there is no evidence that Bismarck ever became a thorough convert to the creed of the expansionists. According to Busch, he said in January, 1886: 'In colonial matters we must not take too much in hand at a time, and we already have enough for a beginning.' He added the suggestive remark: 'We must now hold rather with the English, while, as you know, we were formerly more on the French side.' (The last elections in France had shown that it was hopeless to attempt a Franco-German *rapprochement*.) To Bismarck, colonial questions and the question of Egypt were mainly interesting as a means of embittering relations between France and England, and of inflicting pin-pricks upon an English Liberal Ministry. It is often the case that when a man is suffering from some mental or moral malady he suspects others of the disease which afflicts himself; and so it is natural to read that 'the policy of England has constantly been to sow dissension between the continental Powers, or to maintain existing discord on the principle of *duobus litigantibus tertius gaudens*, and to use the one against the other, so that they should be weakened and damaged for the benefit of England.'

It is amusing to compare with this Lord Ampthill's judgement. Lord Ampthill (Odo Russell) was one of the ablest Ambassadors that England has ever had, and this was his opinion:

'Compelled [he wrote in August, 1884] by the colonial mania which has gradually come to the surface in Germany to act contrary to his better convictions in the Angra Pequena question, he [Bismarck] has discovered an unexplored mine of popularity in starting a colonial policy, which public

opinion persuades itself to be anti-English ; and the slumbering theoretical envy of the German at our wealth and our freedom has awakened and taken the form of abuse of everything English in the press.'

If British statesmen erred, it was probably in overrating the seriousness of Bismarek's hostility. He had no intention to proceed to extremities, and he had the strong man's respect for a rival that knew his own mind. On the other hand, concessions made to conciliate Germany failed of their mark. Thus, after it had been decided to proclaim a protectorate over the whole of New Guinea, except that portion of it already occupied by the Dutch, a suggestion of German opposition caused Lord Granville and Lord Derby to decide to limit annexation to the southern portion of this land. This decision not only was distasteful to several members of the Cabinet, but gave serious offence in Australia, whilst it failed to secure the good will of Bismarek. In fact, at the time that a British envoy from the Colonial Office was carrying on at Berlin confidential conversations, the German flag was being hoisted in what became German New Guinea. 'The German Government,' Mr. Meade wrote to Lord Granville, 'have behaved very shabbily to you'; but complaint, a trifle querulous, did not alter accomplished facts.

The mention of New Guinea brings us to a quarter of the world where it can hardly be said that the spirit of ruthless annexation has brooded over the waters of British policy. There is no definite evidence that the foundation of New South Wales had any other object than to provide a settlement for the convicts, who could no longer be sent to the North American continent,

though it is possible that the motive for annexing so huge an area was to ward off the possibility of the French seeking for colonial possessions in the neighbourhood. The Home Government for a long time opposed the colonization of New Zealand, and only yielded when their hands had been forced by private enterprise: though here again, in the case of the South Island, it was shown that Great Britain was not prepared to allow the fruit she had been so long reluctant to touch to be gathered by France.

When the Australasian colonies had developed, the Mother Country showed no favour to their doctrine that the Pacific should be a British lake. In 1860 Great Britain declined the offer of Fiji, though she was driven to accept it fourteen years later. Mr. Basil Thomson, who speaks with authority on the Western Pacific, wrote, in 1900, that 'our policy has been a policy of reluctance to acquire territory. Open markets and coaling stations were not thought of thirty years ago'. Thus Germany and France, in spite of grumbling from Australia and New Zealand, were allowed to make good their position in Samoa, New Caledonia, and other islands. That Australasian complaints were not animated by any feeling of hostility to Germany is shown by the fact that the Anglo-French *condominium* in the New Hebrides is a special subject of criticism. It is true that of recent years the British flag has been hoisted over all the unoccupied islands that can be of use to British interests: but this does not alter the fact that, for very many years, doubtless out of no special magnanimity but out of regard for our interests elsewhere, British policy in the Pacific was so complacent in the matter of foreign competition

as to excite serious dissatisfaction in our own colonies. This question, however, need not detain us here, as it is not concerned with the subject of this pamphlet.

The Empire of India is so vast and its position so different from that of the tropical colonies—its affairs being entrusted to a separate department of State—that we have difficulty in realizing that to a foreign observer India stands on the same footing as the other colonial possessions; but it is of India that our critics are mainly thinking when they term our Empire the fruits of rapine and robbery. What, then, are the facts on this important matter? There can be no question as to the peaceful character of the early English East India Company. Its one object was successful commerce, and with the object-lesson of the Imperial Dutch East India Company before their eyes, shrewd observers, like Sir Thomas Roe, sought to warn the English Company against schemes of territorial sovereignty. The two causes which brought about the foundation of the English Empire were the downfall of the Mogul power, and the attempt of Dupleix in the middle of the eighteenth century to secure India for France. The apathy of the French Government at home and the genius of Clive put an end to Dupleix's dreams of empire; whilst the gradual break-up of the Mogul power reduced the British authorities to the alternative of either tolerating anarchy or assuming some form of control. At first it was sought to act behind the screen of the native sovereignty, but the weakness of the native rule necessitated more and more interference. The great struggle in Europe with Napoleon had its counterpart in the East. The grandiose schemes of Bonaparte aiming at world-empire gave justification for a forward

policy on the part of Lord Wellesley. But whilst its territories were enlarged by its servants, the East India Company was ruefully counting the cost. It was able to recall Lord Wellesley, but his policy was too deeply grounded on the necessities of India not to prevail; and, under his successors, the boundaries of British India were step by step extended. It would need a volume to discuss in detail these separate annexations, but it may be said that in each case local circumstances were put forward to justify such annexation, and it seems certain that, as a rule, they were the result of the decay of the native Governments. Even since the trend of opinion has been against new annexations, general political considerations have necessitated, both on the west and on the east, new additions to the Indian Empire.

That Great Britain has no desire to destroy native Governments where they can govern efficiently, is shown by the case of the native States of the Malay Peninsula. By conserving old titles and old feudal institutions as far as possible, by dealing gently with local prejudices and by acting through the medium of the native rulers, British residents at the courts of these rulers have been able to bring about a material and moral improvement to which it would be difficult to find a parallel elsewhere; while they have been able to avoid that break with the past which so often has produced disastrous results in the history of native races. The example of the Federated Malay States may, at least, serve to suggest that when annexations have come about, they have been the outcome, not of any special ambitions or megalomania on the part of the British Government or its officers, but

because, either from their inherent weakness or from contact with European civilizations, native Governments have tended to fall to pieces as the winter snows melt before the sunshine of spring; and, when the choice lies between anarchy or the assumption of rule, no people of Imperial instincts can hesitate as to their course.

No doubt it is naturally provoking to Germany that when, at last, she appeared upon the scene as a colonizing Power, the best places in the globe were already appropriated; but it is not our fault if the Monroe Doctrine warns her off the provinces of Brazil, where there is already a large German population. In truth the action of Germany in venting her spleen upon us rather reminds one of the action of an angry child who, having bumped his head against a wall, proceeds to pinch his little brother. No doubt in the making of the British Empire, as in other human transactions, things have happened that one may wish might have happened otherwise. But enough, it is hoped, has been said to show that, if Great Britain was fortunate in her opportunities, her use of them was assuredly not more unscrupulous than the use made of their opportunities by other nations. It has been seen that a certain confusion and uncertainty has been caused by the conflict between the views of statesmen at home and of administrators on the spot, so that the foreign observer might find himself, to his cost, backing the wrong horse. Undoubtedly this ambiguity goes far to explain the charge of hypocrisy and double-dealing which is brought against British statesmen; though for a student of Bismarck's methods it is difficult to say when German indignation is genuine or when it is assumed.

28 THE BRITISH COLONIAL EMPIRE

The above pages have been written to meet the common accusation that the British colonial Empire is the fruits of robbery, but the writer cannot disguise his opinion that such a charge is generally made with the tongue in the cheek. The upholders of the doctrine that might is right have little to find fault with us on this score. The true gravamen of the charge, made against us by Treitschke and his followers, is that we are the weak and unworthy successors of strong men, that our maritime and colonial supremacy exists upon past prestige, and that the British Empire is a huge bladder waiting to be pricked. How far we are the effete and decadent creature of Treitschke's imaginings is a question upon which an Englishman, at the present time, can hardly pronounce an impartial judgment. It will be for future history to decide how far the happenings of this great war may throw light upon the answer.

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