

WHEN THE BRITISH EMPIRE FALLS

"But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked; thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation."—Deuteronomy xxxii, 15.

When the British empire falls it will be from two causes: One is our increasing interest in its problems; the other is our success in solving them. This sounds like a paradox, and so it is. I hasten therefore to add that it does not apply to the self governing portions of the empire, but to the countries—like Egypt, India, Ceylon, and the Malay states—where our rule is autocratic or semi-autocratic in principle and in fact. It is with regard to these countries that I maintain that the two greatest perils that confront us are our wanting to know and our ability to achieve. And if I were called upon for my proofs I should answer by pointing to Lord Cromer's recent report.

If you examine into the average Englishman's sense of empire you find it to consist of a vague pride of ownership and nothing more. Take, for instance, the case of India. The "man in the street" is a whole encyclopaedia of Indian misinformation. The subject is altogether too vast and remote for the ordinary busy citizen. You will find, if you pump him with sufficient diligence, a few tangled recollections of Clive and the Black Hole of Calcutta, some more definite convictions as to Mr. Kipling and the difficulties of the Indian civil service examination, a suspicion that Anglo-Indians are overpaid, and in the background a vast miscellany of jungles, frontier wars, jewels, tigers, famines, white temples, disordered livers, and Russian intrigues.

In other words, he knows nothing about India. It remains for him and for most of us just a brilliant abstraction. You who read this and who are ultimately responsible for what is being done in your name between the Himalayas and Cape Comorin, and who would fight to the last to keep the British Raj intact, could not give a clear outline of even one of the thousand fascinating problems that face the rulers of that fascinating country. A Durbar may jog your interest, a frontier war may even excite it, and some confused notion that Russia needs watching is probably always more or less at work at the back of your mind. But when India is neither particularly spectacular, nor particularly at war, nor particularly harassed by "Russian designs," you find it frankly dull.

I am not urging this as a reproach. Far from it. I rejoice at the healthy and judicious indifference of our people. It shows that they possess the true secret of empire. I can imagine nothing more fatal than that India should become a topic on which every Englishman felt bound to have an opinion, and when I say India I mean, of course, every country in which we are ruling Orientals by ways we do not apply to ourselves. Every Englishman for nearly a hundred years has felt bound to have an opinion on Ireland, which is a country not without its streak of Orientalism—and look at the result! Our national genius for not bothering about the principles and daily detailed workings of our imperial rule has been the greatest safeguard of the empire. The empty benches in the house of commons when such subjects are up are an overwhelming demonstration of political common sense.

But there are signs that this common sense is passing from us, and is being replaced by an unpolitic curiosity. More and more members are growing fatally interested in the empire, are beginning to ask for streams of fact, are fussing over little incidents, are prying into this and questioning that, and are doing what they can to convert the supremacy of the house of commons over our alien dependencies from a necessary fiction into an inquisitorial fact. Mr. Byles and Mr. Robertson and their friends typify the spirit and the scope of these activities. They bring to the problem of Oriental government great earnestness, a colossal altruism, no imagination, a profound faith in the democratic idea, and no local knowledge.

This is an impossible equipment for imperial statesmanship, and its increasing favor among our radical sentimentalists is a danger of the first magnitude. When we find in the house of commons a growing number of men whose conscience will not allow them to be democratic at home and autocratic abroad, who will never be persuaded that one nation's meat may be another nation's poison, who regard all men and all societies as equally capable of self-government, who are obsessed by a mania for political proselytism, and whose instinct is to govern India, and Egypt, and the Malay states

on the lines of a somewhat larger Warwickshire, we may be sure England is well on the road to confirming Froude's dictum that "free peoples can not govern subject races."

All democracies sooner or later feel this temptation, and most of them succumb to it. There is nothing the French like better than applying the "principles of 1789" to the natives of the Congo; and the Americans have no other conception of tropical government than that of dumping upon the Filipinos all the privileges of American citizens and all the paraphernalia of democracy. Even we, though restrained hitherto by the wholesome apathy of our people and by their instinct for trusting the man on the spot, have foisted upon India and Egypt any number of institutions and contrivances of a purely Occidental character—not in the least because India or Egypt wanted them, but simply because we were used to them at home.

But there is another and more insidious peril that threatens the empire, a peril that has been created by our very success. The most pregnant though the least noticed sentence in Lord Cromer's report was that in which he practically took upon himself the responsibility for the growth of the Egyptian nationalist idea. "It has been evoked," he said, "by the benefits which, with a rapidity probably unparalleled in history have been conferred on the country by the introduction of western civilization at the hands of an alien race; and it is surely the irony of political destiny that that race, or the instruments through whom it has principally acted, should be represented as the principal obstacles to the realization of schemes the conception of which is mainly due to their own action."

Those who will ponder these words and their implications will come very near the heart of the master-problem of imperialism. Stated in the broadest terms, that problem is the infinitely arduous and delicate one of escaping the penalties of too much good government. We enter these alien countries determined and able to rule them for their own benefit. We begin by imposing peace and establishing order. We go on to deal out to the peoples under our rule the one novelty that Orientals always appreciate—that of even-handed justice. We pass from this to increasing their prosperity, to educating them, to surrounding their persons and property with innumerable securities. At the same time we preserve to them, with as little interference as possible, their distinctive social and religious customs.

At first the natives, if not grateful, realize at all events that they are better off, and remain passive. Then comes a generation which, having known no other conditions, takes all we have done for it for granted. Meek acceptance gives way to criticism; criticism passes into abuse; abuse is developed into a demand for some share in directing the administration we have erected. We yield to that demand and admit natives here and there, in government offices, in local councils, in the lower ranks of the civil and judicial service. The old days of decisive personal autocracy have passed; the new days of government by system, and a system which acknowledged the representative principle, have come.

The agitator arises. Each new concession is made a stepping stone to another. Our own sphere of influence contracts and that of native opinion expands. The gulf between rulers and ruled grows daily greater; clouds of intervening native officials swarm between the administrators and the people. The railways bring a new aid to intercourse and therefore to solidarity and therefore to agitation. We educate more men than we can find employment for and thereby foster discontent. Industrialism comes with all its quickening impulses, and a native press preaches sedition and stimulates an intellectual ferment. The old task of creation was not easy, but it was as nothing by the side of the new task of assimilation.

Thus the very excellence of our rule provides the means for its overthrow, and its material success implies that we are producing the conditions most favorable to its resistance. —Sydney Brooks, in London Daily Mail.

MAJORITY RULE CATECHISM

The initiative and referendum are explained in the following questions and answers, supplied by the National Federation for People's Rule:

What is majority rule? It is the people's rule as distinguished from the rule of the few. Does majority rule exist in the United

States? Not in national affairs, nor in state and municipal affairs except where the voters have re-established a system whereby they can ballot direct on public questions.

What other names has the direct-vote system? One form of it is the initiative and referendum. Another is the advisory initiative and advisory referendum, frequently termed the initiative and referendum principle.

What is the chief difference in these systems? One requires a constitutional amendment for its establishment, the other can be installed by statute law—a most decided difference.

What is the system through which the few are in power? Machine rule.

What is its distinguishing feature? The final power as to legislation is in the political machine. In other words, there is no system whereby the voters can instruct representatives after they are in office, nor is there any way whereby the voters can veto the acts of their representatives or exercise the power of direct legislation.

How would you describe machine rule? It is the rule of the few through popular forms. The people vote but do not rule.

Who favors machine rule? Those who have secured private monopolies and those who desire them.

What is the result of majority rule? It quickly terminates private monopolies (special privileges). Special privileges can exist only where the few are in power.

A QUESTION ANSWERED

"Hasn't the president already settled upon Mr. Taft as his successor?" sneeringly asks Mr. Bryan's Commoner. Hasn't The Commoner already settled upon Mr. Bryan as the candidate the democratic party must nominate?—Sioux City Journal.

The Commoner has not "already settled upon Mr. Bryan as the candidate the democratic party must nominate." The rank and file of the democratic party will select the democratic candidate. The democratic party has no masters into whose hands has been given the matter of providing the candidate and outlining the issues.

A CORRECTION

In a recent issue of The Commoner it was stated that the first town to be named for Mr. Bryan was located in Oklahoma and that the name was selected by James Simmons. It should have been printed James Emmons.

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