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# The British-American Adventures Toward Liberty

BY  
RALPH W. PAGE

## Britain, Mother of Colonies

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POULTNEY BIGELOW, F.R.G.S.

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# Britain, Mother of Colonies

How an Enormous Empire of Subject Peoples Has Been Built up by the Tact, Intelligence, and Good Faith of a Handful of Administrators Who Treat the Natives as Human Beings

By

POULTNEY BIGELOW, F. R. G. S.

(Author of "History of the German Struggle for Liberty, 1806-1848")

YOU have paid me the compliment of requesting an opinion on the Colonial administration of our Mother Country and to such a request I yield cheerful obedience. But let me warn the reader that an opinion on so vast a theme is dangerous—much like asking a sailor his opinion of the Atlantic or a politician his estimate of the American voter. True—I have traveled and studied in almost every British Colony; have visited also many dependencies of France, Spain, Portugal, America, and Germany; have made four journeys round the world in search of light on this vexed problem, and yet feel that the best I can do is to enter the stand as a witness, tell what I saw and let the reader think for himself.

In the year of the Spanish War (1898) Germany proved herself our enemy by sending to Manila Bay a squadron of war ships with orders to intimidate Admiral Dewey and secure from Spain the remnant of her insular possessions in those Far Eastern waters. The sailor of Uncle Sam, however, declined to play the part assigned to him by the Kaiser; on the contrary, although much inferior in war strength, he cheerfully stripped for the fight; whereupon Admiral von Diederich tucked his pennant between his legs and disappeared to Kiao-Chau.

To Kiao-Chau I followed him and found a German colony one year old. It was a colony on the Prussian plan—barracks and batteries—drill ground and goose step. The Chinese population had been forcibly dispossessed to make room for administrative quarters and avenues of Berlin breadth and symmetry. The colony had been conquered by the sword and was held by the sword alone. The natives were compelled to labor at prices fixed by the conqueror; all signs and legal notices were in Gothic type; it was *verboten* to use any language other than the German tongue.

In short, although I was received with civility by the Governor and entertained by the garrison mess, it was clear that this colonial venture was a failure from the start—it was a colony in name but there were no colonists; much military but no merchants; many barracks but no warehouses.

For twenty years Kiao-Chau flew the flag of the Hun—twenty years of perpetual pettiness in administration and brutality in the execution of unjust laws. Nothing was omitted that could humiliate the natives of the soil or create Mongolian sympathy with other victims of Prussianization in Poland, Denmark, Alsace—to say nothing of blacks in Africa and Papuans in New Guinea.

Parenthetically permit me to say that I visited every station of German New Guinea after more than a quarter century of Prussian rule and found everywhere struggling replicas of Kiao-Chau—hundreds of notice boards warning the naked natives to keep off the grass—all in the unintelligible script of the conqueror. Every Colonial station was conspicuously recognizable because of the geometrical pattern of its administrative landing stage, its path leading to the Governor's palace, the jail, barracks, and drill ground. Everywhere sullen silence amongst the wretched natives and harsh gutturals from the homesick officials of the Fatherland. The jails and barracks were active—all the rest was suggestive of that ominous obedience which precedes the signal of a popular insurrection. To be a German was to be an enemy in every part of the Archipelago—to speak English was to carry a passport honored in every hut.

Without going further for illustration—East or West Africa for instance—let me carry you from this theatre of perpetual punitive expeditions and administrative failure to any territory you may select where the British flag proclaims equal rights or at least fair play to the native.

At Hong-Kong in that same year of the Kiao-Chau visit, Great Britain added a large area as hinterland to that splendid port. This matter I studied with much personal interest because it followed closely on the Russian seizure of Port Arthur and the Prussian conquest of Kiao-Chau—both of which were accomplished as acts of war and as grievous insults to the Chinese Government. Not so in the case of England—not a shot was fired, scarce an angry word exchanged. A quiet young Scotchman, Lockhart by name, who happened to be Colonial Secretary of Hong-Kong and who like the rest of his craft understood Chinese character and speech, made an excursion into the territory about to be annexed. He did not draw his sword—or even lead a military escort. He went with his life in his hand to talk the matter over with the different heads of districts and villages.

The Chinaman is the most reasonable and intelligent of men. He despises mere brute strength but is quick to appreciate justice and commercial opportunity. And thus it happened here that my quiet friend (now Sir Stewart Lockhart) annexed to the British Empire in a few days and without firing a shot a territory more valuable to the world's commerce than all the colonies of the Kaiser with all their sunken millions and discontented natives.

#### HONG-KONG THE CONTENTED.

From Hong-Kong go thousands of Chinese annually to labor under contract in the mines of the Malay islands; the rubber plantations of Borneo; the tobacco fields of Sumatra or the sugar estates of the West Indies. Indeed, contract laborers sign cheerfully from any Eastern port to any part of the world so long as they have the word of the British Government that their contract will be honestly enforced against employer no less than employee. You can find in South Africa and the Caribbean no less than in the Eastern tropics British subjects of every color and creed from Bombay or Calcutta; Penang or Singapore; Wei-Hai-Wei or Hong-Kong cheerfully signing themselves away for a five year labor term in Jamaica or Trinidad; Natal or Demerara. They are confident that the conditions under which they embark will be observed; that the wages mentioned will be punctually paid; that the food will be adequate and the housing according to the sanitary rules; that the

labor will be done under wholesome conditions—in short, that after five years of enlistment as a laborer the Chinaman, Hindoo, or Kaffir may count upon a return to his home satisfied that the British Commissioner of native labor has paternally watched over his interests and encouraged others to follow in his steps.

No other country of my ken can point to such victories in the field of peaceful colonial conquest as England for the last three quarters of a century. There is no other colonial field of my acquaintance where I would feel safe in walking from end to end with no weapon more destructive than a bamboo cane.

Far be it from me to pretend that the bungling tourist cannot find ample scope for blood curdling adventure and many pages of profitable romance. One has but to outrage the religious practices of Brahmins or Mussulmans to gather material for many thrilling chapters; and if the survivor still yearns for fictional fame he has but to tamper with the women of a Malay Head Hunter or sneer at the crest of a Samurai of Dai Nippon. But the tame walking stick of my wanderings has little to record. To me the patient observing of animals has more charm than their slaughter; I marvel at my contemporaries who have waded in blood amidst scowling savages where my more commonplace eyes and ears have been refreshed by native dance and gentle hospitality. In the jungle of German New Guinea where successive administrators with fiercely elevated mustache tips assured me that the natives were hopelessly addicted to ferocious cannibalism I have wandered unarmed and unattended—safe so soon as the native knew that I was not German.

Basutoland has been the habitat of the most warlike of Kaffir tribes and when I visited that country (1896) I found scarce half a dozen Englishmen ruling more than a quarter of a million black savages in a country with not a single road, or bridge, or telegraph pole or newspaper—not a single sign of what we call progress save this lonesome but fearless handful of British Colonial administrators who lived in the midst of these turbulent tribesmen with the same unconcern that we have noted in the veteran soldier who is ready at any moment to fall asleep even whilst the artillery is roaring its message of prospective hand to hand battle.

It was Sir Godfrey Lagden who ruled

Basutoland twenty years ago. He is now retired, but Basutoland continues prosperous and quiet because the system of the Mother country brings forward an abundance of men qualified for just such unobtrusive tasks. In my lifetime no shot has been fired in anger throughout that territory and to-day, should any chief dare to prove insubordinate, there is no punishment that would be more keenly felt by the nation at large than the mere threat, on the part of the British Governor, that he would pack up and abandon them. Such administrative rule as this calls for men who are not tied up with red tape, who have infinite good sense, and no fear of death.

Germany had a most efficient system, but it did not work. England has had no very distinct system, but it has worked admirably. Of the many causes which have procured this result perhaps the most important is the broad fact that men for the Colonial service are carefully selected; that they are handsomely paid; that they are trusted; that they are promoted without regard to politicians and that after a certain number of years devoted to their country they may retire on an adequate pension. The practical effect of this system is to create a body of administrators whom the natives trust. All men respect truth and courage. Small wonder then that a simple sport loving Briton can rule millions of Hindoos by merely a hint to their Rajah who bows before that hint because he knows it is the hint of an official who speaks true and cannot take a bribe.

In the days of the old Sultan of Brunei I visited that sanguinary potentate's capital which lies between Sarawak and British North Borneo and is inhabited by head hunting Malays very expert in predatory warfare. In this most lonesome quarter of our globe I met (1906) a clear eyed sport loving young Briton who had a bungalow and a war canoe and apparently nothing to do but look indifferent and wait for the moment when some Dyak should run amuk in his path. He was the only white man in the Sultan's savagery save a few traders who came for cocoanut fibre. He told me that he had no authority—was simply sent there to look about—that he belonged in the Colonial service at Singapore.

#### WHAT YOUNG MCARTHUR DID

This was all true; but what he did not say and what I learned from other lips was that whenever his Sultanic and Satanic majesty

was guilty of some project needlessly outrageous my simple young sportsman from Singapore would whistle for his war canoe crew; paddle over to the Imperial Palace; sip coffee; smoke an enormous Sultanic cheroot; exchange a very few words with this august representative of Mahomet and then once more mount his war canoe and paddle back to his bungalow. All this was purely a pleasant piece of every day platonic politeness. No sabre was rattled, no mailed fist unveiled, no harsh words uttered. Our listless British visitor (his name was McArthur) merely remarked in a careless way—referring to some murderous or thieving project—“Yes—it has its good points, *but*, I wouldn't do it just now—it wouldn't look well on paper—they don't like things in London—queer people the English—yes—very—good day—etc.!!”

Now this little episode has no particular importance unless you read on and learn that when the old Sultan died a few years later his empire became part of an English colony so quietly that few noticed what happened; and none regretted the change, least of all the natives.

Only those of superficial thinking talk of England as “*gobbling up*” or “*conquering*” colonial territory. This view is Prussian by origin and American by adoption. The truth is that in the last three quarters of a century Britain has had colonial responsibilities thrust upon her; has sought to divest herself of them but has been finally forced to expand not merely by the call of her countrymen but by that of the natives.

In 1898 Stewart Lockhart was Colonial Secretary in Hong-Kong—the same who incorporated the adjacent territory of Kowloon. He is now Governor of Wei-Hai-Wei ruling another Chinese area, about 100 miles from Kiao-Chau. Here as in the southern post, not only does he find the Chinese contented under the British flag, but desirous of fighting under it and against the hated German.

#### LUGARD'S WORK IN CHINA

During my last visit to Hong-Kong (1910) the Governor (General Sir Frederick Lugard) laid the foundation stone of a Chinese University. The money for this important seat of learning was contributed largely if not entirely by Chinese merchants and officials. The three faculties of medicine, morals and engineering were repre-

sented and the purpose was to save Chinese students the cost of the journey to England by arranging for examinations in Hong-Kong that should entitle the candidates to degrees equal to those of the London University. Here then was the military governor of a British colony on Chinese territory commanding so completely the confidence of the public, no less than the officials, that they reared under the guns of his fortress a purely Chinese school of learning in perfect reliance on the word of an English administrator.

So far I have met no one who ever heard of this Hong-Kong University, but I venture to think that in the history of our race no prouder page could be written than that which recorded this proof of British uprightness in her dealings with China. To be sure Sir Frederick Lugard deserves much credit; but without the system which permits the rise of such men, there would be in Hong-Kong the same dull colonial routine that has made Germany lose all her million square miles of colony at the first sound of a bugle proclaiming war against Prussianism. The name of Lugard was honored already some thirty years ago when first I had the honor of grasping his honest hand. He was then a young and very impecunious captain thirsting for an opportunity of getting killed or anything else that would keep him alive. He went to Eastern Africa, soon showed that he had in him the stuff of the empire builder and has risen from one post to another until now he is to Africa what Lord Roberts was to India.

The word system I have used for want of a better. Perhaps I might say with more exactness that England's colonial success has been due to the fact that she never has had any system—at least in theory. Had the London Colonial office formulated a scientific theory of Colonial administration akin to that which Berlin has for thirty years applied to her tropical dependencies, the result might have been almost as disastrous. Fortunately for British fame, the very absence of uniformity or system permitted each Colonial administrator to apply to each native territory the rule most comfortable to native custom or prejudice. It is the mania of the orthodox official to simplify his work by making rules to which all must conform. Now we know that no two people are alike even in our own state or village; yet a Prussian Minister will send out a book of paragraphs accord-

ing to which all natives are to be ruled whether Mohammedan or Buddhist; Bantu or Papuan. The Berlin official cannot see why the drill regulations of the Potsdam garrison are not equally applicable to the Kanaka of Samoa or the Herero of West Africa.

Nor can the German people penetrate the careless generosity of a British parliament capable of permitting one million square miles of colonial territory to pass under the Kaiser's yoke merely because Queen Victoria was partial to things German and the British public dreamed the dream of the Pacifist and believed that the rule of William II meant the Rule of Peace throughout the colonial world.

Germany gladly seized the colonies which England released and ever since that time has waged a campaign of hatred and slander against her benefactor. Yet today England can arm the natives in any one of her dependencies and turn them against our common enemy, whereas after thirty years of Prussianizing not a colony of the Kaiser but rejoices when the black eagle drops from over the Governor's gate-way.

#### INDIA A HUGE SUCCESS

Is India an exception? Germans have wearied me for many years by their tales of alleged native discontent, and their groaning under the heels of British military boots! But how many military boots would be needed, think you, in order to successfully trample down a discontented population of 400 millions of intelligent people? These are matters so elementary that they are not to be discussed in the pages of such a review. The reader has but to consult the "Statesmen's Year Book" or any respectable almanac and there learn that in all India Britain maintains a military establishment so minuscule as to deserve the name of a merely nominal police force. It is some years since I was in Delhi and Calcutta (1910) but it needed no special training for any observer to note that the emissary of the Kaiser was at work there as in this country working up a propaganda hostile to the government. In every German colony Englishmen have been hampered if not wholly prevented from doing business. On the contrary, German commercial agents have been accorded equal rights and generous treatment wherever they moved under the British flag and this hospitality

has been shamefully abused for the purpose not merely of spying but of organizing sedition under the specious cloak of socialistic pacifism.

So far I have referred only to British Colonial rule as affecting black, yellow, brown or alien races. We have known of German machination and money widely distributed for the purpose of compelling the mother country to employ her army in quelling rebellious natives rather than helping France on the western front. We have seen the Prussian plot a failure and the duplicity of the Berlin cabinet exposed. We have had the profound joy of seeing generosity rewarded; of seeing the natives of every creed, color and climate raising their voices in one common chorus of disgust at the cruelty, the treachery, the sacrilegious mutilations done by a Prussian monarch who dared to proclaim himself the apostle of Kultur! The Afghan from the Khyber; the Hindoo from Benares or Madras; the Zulu, Matabele or Basuto; the swarthy men of the Malay Archipelago; millions of Chinese and every island from the Bahamas to Trinidad—not a race, not a religion but would unite with Great Britain in driving back to his Baltic swamps and pine barrens the desecrater of Rheims—the unmistakable offspring of Europe's traditional enemy who have for near twenty centuries plun-

dered on the outskirts of white man's civilization—their name has varied—now Goth, now Vandal—now Hun—now Hohenzollern.

Shall I say yet a word of the white man's greater Britain—Australia, New Zealand, North America, South Africa? Do we not all recall the monotonous assurances of Prussian professors that this war would be the signal for every colony to throw off the British Yoke! Alas, poor Prussia! When God distributed his gifts to the races of mankind he gave quick wits to the Yankee, laughter to the Negro and infinite patience to the Chinaman. But to thee, as to the donkey, he gave an impenetrable hide and total absence of humor. So go on with the war—it has made the Boer and Briton march together like brothers against the man who wrote the Kruger despatch; it had made Canada and Australia glad to pour out their blood in the trenches of France but above all, O Prussian donkey, I bless thy pachydermatous propaganda for thou hast at last opened the eyes of this good natured nation to the snake-like quality of thy professions and the deadening effect of thy Kultur. The war is costly; the war is deadly and the end is not in sight; but however costly in death or dollars it can never be a price too high to pay if it restore to us our dignity as a nation and our manhood as Americans.

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