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THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM OF EMPIRE
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ONE-THIRD of the entire population of the earth is held as subject inhabitants of colonies, protectorates, or dependencies. Five hundred million people are thus deprived, in a greater or less degree, of the powers of self government. Many of these are held by the most tenuous bonds; nearly all are manifesting the signs of restlessness. The rising spirit of democracy is at work among all these peoples, strengthening the spirit of revolt among the subject and weakening the powers of resistance in the "strong" governments to meet the protests, whether active or passive, of colonies and dependencies daily growing more uneasy.

We have reached the parting of the ways in the path of the progress of nations. It is time to take account of the forces of civilization, and the theories that have actuated nations in their plans of conquest and subjugation. The old statesmanship has broken down; the wisdom of universally accepted policies has received in the last few years an unexpected shock, and the consciousness that we are on the eve of the breaking up of empires has led many to question whether the theory of "overlordship" as not its rigid limitations, coming only at this late day to be revealed. The "little peoples" have suddenly manifested tremendous powers of resistance to policies of absorption active as well as passive resistance. Many, too, appear to be biding their time, clinging tenaciously in the meantime to customs tending to perpetuate the national consciousness. The race sentiment has not been permitted to die out, and this, with resentment for olden wrongs, promises at any time to flame forth in active revolution.

Meanwhile the positions of the "overlording" nations have not become stronger, but really weaker with time. Slowly but surely

domestic policies are taking precedence of international questions, and while aristocracies and privilege, arming themselves for a life and death struggle, seek to entrench themselves in increased centralization, the forces of a rising democracy are slowly but surely sapping the foundations of the “strong” governments, making them ever weaker in fact if not in appearance as time goes on. Such governments are in no position to curb the national aspirations so long secretly conserved by the subject peoples.

Even of Great Britain this is true. She was forced to abandon the position of unconditional submission, and make a treaty of peace with the Boers. Her policy has brought for her the permanent hatred of more than one-half of her subjects in Cape Colony. The infamy of her Chinese ordinance, by which thousands of Chinamen were brought into the Transvaal under conditions little better than serfdom, the practical dictatorship of Lord Milner, with his lavish expenditure for salaries and maintenance, beside which the charges of extravagance made against President Kruger’s administration are dwarfed to insignificance, have left appalling consequences in their wake. That South Africa is lost to Great Britain seems by no means an unlikely prediction. Slowly these Dutchmen of long memories are gathering up the pitiful shreds of their broken nationality and weaving the fabric anew. What Kruger’s lion-like courage could not avail is being wrought by the ceaseless activities of these patient farmers of the African veldt.

And what of India? Will it always sleep? Has it not been admitted by the wisest military judges—Lord Roberts himself—that it would not be possible to hold India by force of arms?—only by the good will of India. And what has been done within the last decade by other means than force to unite closer the bonds that bind India to the Empire? Certainly Lord Curzon, the late Viceroy, has done but little in that direction. To say nothing of the barbaric splendor of his fetes, the annexation of the Oude has brought to the rulers the alienation of a great province. Great Britain has hitherto relied upon the sectarianism of Hinduism to mitigate the antagonism to her rule. That this can no longer be implicitly relied on was proven not long ago when the priest

of Kali issued a proclamation which runs significantly: "Give up your religious differences and animosities. Worship your country." Fifty thousand persons took an oath on this occasion, pledging to abstain from the use of foreign goods as far as possible, and to buy only of their own countrymen. Those who read coming events by the shadows they cast before them, have not been unmindful of this incident. History is long in the making. If Lord Curzon's policy was mischievous it was less so than the militarism of the Indian government which has set in with the advent of Lord Kitchener. The policy of Lord Kitchener succeeds that of Lord Curzon, and the only thing that grim martinet understands is the power of the sword. Great Britain in India is treading dangerous quick sands in which her feet seem slowly to be sinking.

It is the contention of competent authorities like William Digby[*Prosperous British India] that the condition of India was better under the native rulers. Many improvements, railroads and irrigation works, have been introduced, and many execrable customs stamped out. But these have been paralleled by the decay of national industries and the greater severity of periodically recurring famines. Schools have been reluctantly granted—Madras, the oldest Presidency, after fifty years had but one English school. The closing of the highest administrative offices to men of the Indian race has been a deliberate policy, and the discouragement of Indian industries has been an application, more or less consistently followed, of Great Britain's theory of her relation to the subject races. Native Indian congresses have lately breathed a spirit unfavorable to a continuation of this policy..

Let us now turn to that huge whale of an empire, Russia. It was the wise Goethe who said that there was a provision in nature preventing trees from growing into the sky. Russia has reached the limits of her march to empire. When such limits are reached decay sets in. The disease of empire is militarism and a weakening of the virile national economies. The progress of such decay is sometimes arrested by the appearance of some towering genius who stalks the field like a

dragon. But his departure leaves the country an easy prey to assailing forces from within and without.

It seems to be assumed that the natural evolution of society points to the continued absorption of smaller states by the greater, and the gradual merging of these combinations into still larger political aggregations. Such is the position taken by Professor Giddings in his able work, "Democracy and Empire." He views this tendency with perfect complacency because he believes that democratic progress is not likely to be checked in our own or future times. He boldly propounds the thesis that democracy and empire are "only correlative aspects of the evolution of mankind." But he is forced to admit the paradoxical character of his thesis.

What deceives observers like Professor Giddings is the phenomenon of a great existing empire like Great Britain that allows to her colonial possessions perfect freedom in matters of home government. The bounds of her possessions stretch in every direction. But the looseness of existing ties is the secret of their duration. Were they looser still they would last even longer. But with the rising democratic sentiment of Great Britain they have become even more tenuous, and as democracy rises still higher the empire will weaken with the weakening of the sentiment that sustains it.

If the empire is really a process of evolution by which family kinship is succeeded by tribal kinship, and these again by larger communities of interest, empires must themselves yield to the process by which they are embraced into even larger families of government. That there is a law determining the growth of communities, kingdoms and governments seems entirely probable. But we do not know what it is. It seems likely, however, that it sets the bounds of empire at that point where democratic forms of government may secure the greatest working efficiency within the largest possible group, since there is a point where the governing unit cannot increase beyond the maximum efficiency of government. And it is by no means unreasonable to assume that democracy has a tendency to increase rather than to

diminish the number of these groups, and to restrict rather than to enlarge the boundaries of their “spheres of influence.”

I say this while believing in “the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the world.” But these must come about by forces alien to those we know as “the empire.” The democracy of the groups and a world-wide fraternization are not antagonistic conceptions. It is empire that teaches and conserves latent hostilities; it is self-governing democracies that bridge ancient animosities with eager and friendly understandings, for democracies, respecting their own rights, are not so ready to assail the rights of others.

When two peoples are brought into contact as conqueror and subject it is at the expense of the continued stability and the moral status of one or both. When the conquered races cease to cherish the hope of revolution it is because decay succeeds as a consequence of subjugation. To the conqueror time brings its revenges in subtle deteriorations, concealed from themselves for the most part because of the exhilaration of racial pride.

Conquest is bad for both races. It spells decay or demoralization almost always for the conqueror. The deterioration is first physical, the conqueror succumbing to the new climate to which he is unaccustomed. The forcible deprivation of primitive habits plays havoc with the conquered; the robust virtues of savagery are too rudely interfered with. Moral restraints are discarded, and then come the stories, at which we shudder, of the Germans in Africa, the French in Anam, the Americans in the Philippines. Conquest de-civilizes the conqueror. In China we destroyed with barbaric hands the things the Chinaman cherishes as sacred. He turns and sits upon what we regard as sacred. Thus a habit of hatred is born, a reconciliation is difficult; a double destruction is wrought, and what is best in both civilizations is set back.* This is everywhere the history of the overthrow of institutions by the forcible hand.

That the dream of empire which has deluded the nations is becoming rudely shattered is evident whichever way we look. This has been

helped by the latest occurrence of world-wide significance, the victory of Japan over Russia, but it has not been the cause of it. The subject eastern races are now looking in the direction of Japan; the Mikado's empire has taken the initiative in thrusting back the dominant power of the West, and asserting for the first time the formidability of the East in arms.

But this is not the only contemporary event indicative of the waning power of empire. Morocco defies France, Italy is defeated in a test of arms at Eritrea; [*Chinese] the Boxer uprising portends the slowly gathering forces of Chinese revolt against interference from without.

Gordon was certain that China's regeneration would have to come from within. The facts of conquest and subjugation are sometimes upheld by appeals to the philosophy of evolution. We hear much of "the survival of the fittest," "the struggle for existence," as having some sort of application to the subjugation of weaker by stronger governments. Conquest and Imperialism are conceived of as possessing a biological likeness to the life of organisms, and are dignified as part of the great cosmic process. History, as those of this school contend, may even be taught as a branch of biology. If a weaker government is overthrown by a stronger it is because the former is no longer "suited to its environment." With various digressions, the names of Darwin and Spencer are used, and phrases borrowed from the evolutionary philosophy to justify the policy of international spoliation.

This is the merest caricature of Darwinism. The life of human society possesses functions analogous to the individual life, but such likeness is not close enough to warrant any profitable deduction. Communities do not exhibit the same phenomena as other life; they are born, and are sometimes destroyed; but they do not necessarily die. There is no reason that we can assign why they should not continue indefinitely. No functional activity of society is subject to any natural decay, and whereas individuals must die, communities are constantly renewed. There are certain tendencies from the result of which we can safely prophesy national decay and even death, but these are not inherent in

society, and are the results for the most part of violations of the natural law. We see that human society prospers and thrives, and communities grow in strength through the observance of the great overshadowing moral laws—and that we are not dealing with problems in the consideration and solution of which what we know of biology can serve us. They are, as Spencer himself was forced to call them, “super-organic.”

The fact is, these analogies occur only to the most superficial. It is certain that Darwin would have rejected them, as in the main Spencer was compelled to do, for though he attempted to extend the doctrine of organic evolution to the problems of human society he was obliged to indicate its limitations. It is now brought forward as the last defence of a policy seen to be morally indefensible in the hope of buttressing the falling principles of empire with a doctrine only vaguely apprehended in the popular mind, but having the apparent sanction of scientific authority.

It is assumed in this latest and perverted apprehension of the doctrine of evolution that the destruction of an inferior race by the stronger is an inevitable result of such contact, and these shallow philosophers accept it with a sigh of pious resignation. It is painful, of course, but it is nature's way, and we cannot quarrel with nature. Thus we quiet the promptings of our moral nature. But Darwinism and “the survival of the fittest” contemplate no such cruel perversion of the moral law for the triumph of what is best in humanity and government. To believe so is to misread that philosophy.

There is a law of the survival of the fittest in human relations. But it is wholly beneficent. When a primitive and an advanced race are brought into contact, both have something to teach the other. The good will survive, not because of domination, but because of contact. Dominion may indeed ruin it all, and make impossible the survival of that which is fittest to survive. It ought to be clear that this conflict of ideals making for the survival of the fittest is raised far above the animal plane, and is no longer dependent upon force. The decay of the Hawaiian race is an instance in point. The superior race brought

misery, disease and death to a primitive one previously noted for its moral excellence. Moral deterioration now characterizes a once vigorous people. The primitive race came into contact with that which was worst in the superior race—swaggering whaler and dissolute trader.

The excesses to which the evolutionary philosophers are wont to go is amusingly illustrated in the remark of professor Huxley that “The ethical progress of society consists not in imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combatting it.” Professor Giddings differs from Huxley, because he urges the anti-imperialists to discontinue their agitation against the cosmic processes, evidently regarding such struggle as hopeless. Yet Huxley has no difficulty in conceiving of a world in which the ethical processes are in conflict with the cosmic processes! Is it not clear, however, that this amazing contradiction arises from the failure to conceive the limitations of the doctrine of the struggle for existence, and the importance of the ethical law in the progress of human society? It is the acceptance of this law in its wooden literalness that led Huxley into the monstrous absurdity of imagining cosmic processes against which we must war in the interest of higher moral ideals -- a world in which laws are not in harmony, and in which the creative intelligence is at war with itself. In the whole realm of philosophy from Aristotle to Spencer, full as it is of the grossest delusions, there is hardly an absurdity which competes so successfully for first honors.

Of course the talk of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest is not consistent with the talk of “duty and destiny.” But this later Pecksniffianism is as little to the purpose. We make our own destiny. We are not urged by any power greater than our own determination, than the forces working within us. But these apologies that mouth of duty and destiny are a gratifying evidence of the growing sensitiveness of nations. We heard nothing of the kind in other times. Campaigns of conquest were undertaken with no apologies. It is true that a particular national deity was supposed in most cases to watch over and direct these careers of conquest. But

there was nothing moral about these peculiar deities. Thucydides tells us that when Milos refused to yield obedience, the reply was, “ We demand that each shall regulate his pretensions upon his strength. There is no question of the claims of justice save where the power to act is equal between the two parties, and those who have the advantage exact everything they can, and the weak are accorded whatever is exacted of them. Men have ever been determined as if by a natural necessity to rule wherever they have the power.” There was nothing in the declared policies of conquest in the olden times that exhibited any respect for moral precepts. Conquest was never undertaken for the good of the conquered. Doubtless much of this modern talk of duty and destiny is the merest hypocrisy. But just as imitation is the homage that vice pays to virtue, so, in a sense, is this increasingly hypocritical attitude a deference to a growing moral sentiment that cannot any longer be wholly ignored.

There is no standard of utility, still less of morals, in our international relations. But there is increasing need of one. We want a world economy that shall answer to the needs of conscience as well as the utilitarian demands. It is obvious that present international relations answer to neither. Here aggressive assertions as to the fitness for domination of the “superior” over inferior peoples is not conclusive. This is the armed petition principle of the plundering nations, but it asks us to take too much for granted. It is a fallacy that contends in effect that a fitness for conquest is a fitness for what is enduring and excellent in civilization. Though we cannot always be certain of what constitutes national superiority, and ought in consequence to be very cautious in forming conclusions, there seems no reason to dispute the general fact that many superior civilizations of the past were overthrown by confessedly inferior nations. Egypt, Babylonia, Byzantium, Greece, Rome, all fell before the assaults of barbaric nations. Yet the old issue of force against right has been refined now to include not only phrases borrowed from the speculative and animal sciences, but force is conceived as not only right in itself, but as something ordained and ceaseless in its activities in determining the trend of civilization. It is good because it is force, and is proved permanently good if it can successfully assert its domination.

It seems a bold thing to claim that empire must now give way to democracy. Believing both democracy and empire to be inevitable, writers like Professor Giddings and Alfred R. Carman, author of “Ethics of Imperialism,” have endeavored, as we have seen, to reconcile them. They see clearly enough that democracy at least is inevitable. But neither sees that such reconciliation becomes more difficult in the face of the accumulating evidence of the breaking down of empire. This evidence is now with us.

Yet bold as seems this conclusion it is really the sanest of propositions. Democracy is the coming force in the world. Empires have not demonstrated that theirs is a vital and enduring principle. Their ruins strew the path of history. The “little peoples” have been absorbed into the finger in obedience, apparently, to the “survival of the fittest,” only to be broken u into smaller aggregations, by no other law, seemingly, than purposeless violence. Empires have died, too, as if by a swollen hugeness — a sort of drowsy of expansion. Existing empires are exhibiting like symptoms. or does t e process of imperialism as has been insisted, show any analogy to the individual struggle for self-preservation. As far as we can judge it is purely a blind process, or but the machinations of designing privilege by which masses of men, held in practical ignorance and slavery by the few, are hurled against weaker aggregations.

It is but an ingenious theory that all the processes of mankind, all their wars, all passing and temporary policies, are good because serving some great evolutionary process. Such theory is an easy and readymade method of solving the problem of evil. The objection to it is that it is too easy. Not all t e conscious processes of men and communities serve some useful purpose. The evolution of mankind is from darkness to light; from dim moral truths vaguely apprehended to a perception of them as “blazing ubiquities,” we struggle upward. Not all institutions are good for the time, which cease when the need for them is outgrown; of some such this may be true, but in the main institutions reflect not so much the needs of the time as the morals of the time.

Does it indeed seem a violent notion that democracy will now reverse the course of empire? Witness then what is transpiring all over the world. Can empire survive in the crucible of this game? In answer to the question Russia must again recur to the mind as the chief and latest illustration. Russian subject races boil and seethe with revolution. Poland, long ago conquered, is rising. Finland is joining her. The liberal policy of Alexander having been abandoned by the present weakling in violation of his coronation oath, revolution is hemming into an ever narrowing circle the government of Nicholas. The policy of repression has brought its fruits. The lust for empire has left the government of the Czar impotent to deal with domestic problems that have arisen.

It is easy to say that a more conciliatory policy, in which the Russian people might have been more favorably dealt with, would have enabled

Russia in this emergency to summon the forces that would successfully have crushed the revolution within her gates. But it ought to be clear that the domestic strength of an overgrown empire must languish eventually, since the very influences that teach the inferiority of other peoples, and the righteousness of the policies that dominate over them, must tend to an ignoring of the rights of the people themselves.

We come then to this conclusion. Two forces render impossible the dream of empire, two forces, each of which is due to the indestructible nature of democracy, and the inevitable laws of its operation. As empire is strengthened, the domestic pillars are weakened —— militarism, indifference to domestic problems and consequent social upheavals appear. With these the state is now powerless to cope, since it has neither the knowledge nor the experience. Its disposition is to deal with it by the same methods that it has employed in its plans of subjugation and conquest. What its own neglect has brought about it would now correct out of the same inexperience. The only lesson it knows is the lesson of arms —— it has unlearned even its incipient

democracy in its dealings with subject peoples. What is clearer than that these peoples who have bided their time should now seize the opportunity and strike for national independence?

This is the most probable course of empire. There is another. But it is alike fatal to empire. This is the concurrent growth of democracy and empire by a process in which we shall imagine neither to be interrupted. As domestic democracy grows it will teach other duties to races brought under its aegis. The empire will not then undergo forcible dissolution, but it will dissolve as by the slow forces of chemical reaction. It will be empire in name only — its colonies will bear to it not even the relation that Canada does to the mother country, and in time even less. As democracy has risen too high for imperialism —in spite of the strength of some of its more recent manifestations ———empires must choose which of the two modes of dissolution they prefer.