

TRIUMPHANT PLUTOCRACY

The Story of
American Public Life
from 1870 to 1920

By
R. F. PETTIGREW
Formerly United States Senator
from South Dakota



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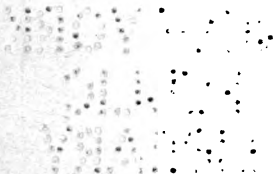
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XXVII. THE U. S. AND THE COURSE OF EMPIRE

The United States has entered upon the course of empire. There is no limit to imperial policy; if we can justify the taking of the Philippines and governing them against their will—if we can justify conquering countries where our Constitution cannot go—our armies will soon be marching across Mexico, down the Isthmus to South America, leaving death and desolation in their track, rearing upon the ruins of those free governments a tyrannical, despotic power.

Let a free people once set out on an imperial course and the institutions that are dear to every lover of liberty disappear like April snow.

Imperial power cannot possibly be maintained without an immense navy and a standing army. Do not the very existence of such an army and such a navy constitute a denial of all that the old America stood for?

Armies and navies are fighting machines. If they are to be successfully operated there must be one man to whom is given supreme control. If there is to be an empire, there must be a dictator, so that he can move with rapidity; so that decisions can be made in a day and armies marched and ships moved where danger is seen. Is despotism what the people of America desire? If so, they will have it—indeed, they now have it under the imperial realities that are cloaked under the guise of republican names and republican traditions. Is it freedom that the American people seek? Then they must abandon the course of empire.

It is impossible for a republican form of government to function as an empire. Republican institutions invariably are corrupted when imperialism is established. Creasy, in his *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*, puts the matter tersely in these words:

“There has never been a republic yet in history that acquired dominion over another nation that did not rule it selfishly and oppressively. There is no single excep-

tion to this rule, either in ancient or modern times. Carthage, Rome, Venice, Genoa, Florence, Pisa, Holland and Republican France, all tyrannized over every province and subject-state where they gained authority."

Imperialism is tyranny and in the process of destroying liberty abroad you crush it effectively at home. Senator Hoar saw the peril. When the question of imperialism was up for discussion in the Senate he said (January 9, 1899):

"We have now to meet a greater danger than we have encountered since the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth—the danger that we are to be transformed from a republic, founded on the Declaration of Independence, guided by the counsels of Washington, into a vulgar, commonplace empire, founded upon physical force."

Read history! The record is unmistakable.

Among the plutocracies and the monarchies of the past, whenever property and power have been gathered into the hands of the few and discontent has appeared among the masses, it has been the policy to acquire foreign possessions, to enlarge the army and the navy, so as to keep discontent occupied and thus distract its attention. A foreign war has cut many a domestic tangle. The recent record of the United States in its acquisition of foreign territory, coming as it does with an increase of the army and the navy, tells the sinister story of the decision which the ruling classes of America have made to pursue an imperial policy.

The growth of the army and navy of the United States during the past twenty years has been phenomenal. When I entered the Senate, the authorized strength of the army was 28,417 men and the annual army appropriation was \$44,582,838. Today the authorized strength of the army is 175,000 and the appropriation requested by the War Department is \$935,000,000. The navy, which received an appropriation of \$22,006,206 in 1890, is asking this year for \$695,000,000. A generation has seen the army and navy of the United States increased from defensive organiza-

tions to the powerful, imperial fighting machines—the dogs of war, larger, stronger and better fed than those belonging to any other nation in the world.

Rome was organized as a republic. For the first six hundred years of her history she had the best government then existing on the globe. To be a Roman citizen was a greater honor than to be a king in another country.

Rome consolidated her power until she ruled all Italy. Then she began to spread out along the northern coast of the Mediterranean to reach into Asia Minor and Africa. But, when the policy of acquiring and ruling peoples who could have no part in her republican form of government began, Rome ceased to exist as a Republic and became an Empire. From that point the historian dates the ruin of her government, and the misery of her population. When Rome had acquired Egypt and Asia Minor with their populations of low consuming power and great tenacity of life, the Roman citizen found that he could not compete against them in the growing of crops or in other industrial enterprises.

The Roman of those days was like the Anglo-Saxon of today—a man of great vitality, requiring excellent nurture, the best food and plenty of it. When he came into competition with the Asiatic races, people of low vitality and with a great tenacity of life—human machines who could subsist upon the least food and perform the most work—the Roman farmer was destroyed, the foundation of power was shattered and the Roman Empire passed away.

When the Roman Republic was established most of its people were farmers. Their farms did not average more than twelve acres in area, indicating a dense rural population. No foreign foe could march through that stockade of individual farm owners to the walls of Rome. They were successful farmers and prosperous, and they made mighty soldiers. Cincinnatus left the plow to lead his victorious legions. This was the situation during the early days of the Roman state.

During the first century of the Christian era centralization of wealth power revolutionized this simple life of the small farm. The lands were absorbed by the wealthy; the mines of silver and gold in Spain and Greece had been worked out; the old republic disappeared and in its place was erected the structure of an empire.

James Bryce says of this period of Roman history:

“The ostentation of humility which the subtle policy of Augustus had conceived, and the jealous hypocrisy of Tiberius maintained, was gradually dropped by their successors until despotism became at last recognized in principle as the government of the Roman Empire. With an aristocracy decayed, a populace degraded, an army no longer recruited from Italy, the semblance of liberty that yet survived might be swept away with impunity. Republican forms had never been known in the provinces at all and the aspect which the imperial administration had originally assumed there soon reacted on its position in the capital. . . . This increased concentration of power was mainly required by the necessities of frontier defense, for within there was more decay than disaffection.”

Great Britain rules over the mightiest of modern empires, but the British people have not been enriched by her conquests. Study the facts with regard to her laboring population. Compare the English factory worker of today with the English yeoman of four or five hundred years ago—compare them in health, in vigor, in quickness of eye and hand, in love of life—in anything you will, and the result will be to the disadvantage of the present-day Britisher.

Where are the people of Europe best off at the present time? Is it in Great Britain—mistress of the sea and ruler of territory scattered over six continents? Not at all! It is in little Switzerland, Holland, Norway. Where is there the best distribution of wealth, the best opportunity for the individual man? Where is there the least poverty, misery and distress? It is

in Switzerland and Norway. It is not in England. Her conquests have bestowed no blessings upon her people. Two-thirds of them own nothing, while about a quarter of a million own all the property of the British Islands.

What blessings has England conferred upon her colonies that would justify the adoption of her policy by the United States? Her course in Ireland has been one of the blackest pages in the history of the world—a record of starvation and plunder.

If England will govern Ireland as she has done, what right has she to claim that she can govern any country? What is there in England's example that can justify us in undertaking the same work?

England began with Ireland. She followed with India. How has that country fared? In India, the English have made practically no converts to Christianity. Neither have the natives learned the English language. A great army, paid for by the native governments themselves, has been maintained to hold the Indian peoples in subjection and to prevent them from securing modern arms and modern implements of destruction. Indian raw materials cannot be manufactured at home because of the taxes imposed by the British authorities. Instead, they are shipped, in English ships, to Great Britain; manufactured and underrated by British manufacturers and merchants, and then transported back to India and sold to the Indian people. As trader, manufacturer, merchant, insurance agent and banker, Great Britain has profited, and India has paid.

What blessing has England conferred upon India? No blessings! On the contrary, she has taken away the food supply of the native population and left millions to die of starvation.

At the time of annexing the Philippines President McKinley said that moral reasons compelled us to stay in the Philippines, and that we, under God's direction, owed a duty to mankind, and more of similar cant.

Here is what John Morley, the English statesman and writer and biographer of Gladstone says with regard to England's policy in this same connection:

"First, you push on into territories where you have no business to be and where you promised not to go; secondly, your intrusion provokes resentment and, in these wild countries, resentment means resistance; thirdly, you instantly cry out that the people are rebellious and that their act is rebellion (this in spite of your own assurance that you have no intention of setting up a permanent sovereignty over them); fourthly, you send a force to stamp out the rebellion; and, fifthly, having spread bloodshed, confusion and anarchy, you declare, with eyes uplifted to the heavens, that moral reasons force you to stay, for if you were to leave, this territory would be left in a condition which no civilized power could contemplate with equanimity or composure. These are the five stages in the Forward Rake's progress."

There is not a word in that passage that does not accord with the excuses given by those American imperialists who are in favor of conquering and ruling unwilling peoples.

Does the United States wish to follow the British example? From it no money will come into the Treasury for the benefit of the people of the United States. The laborers of this land, from whom we raise our taxes in the same way that England raises hers—by a per capita levy on consumption—are invited to contribute this taxation to support an army of occupation and subsidize ships to carry the trade, in order that the people in the outlying territory may be exploited by the trusts of the United States.

There is another reason behind the imperialist program that is being followed by the United States. It is well when people become restless and dissatisfied with the conditions which exist; when the workers of a land learn to believe that they are not receiving their just share of the products of their toil, to give them

amusement—to distract their attention by distant problems—to supply them with bread and circuses, as in Rome, or to do as England has done—begin the killing of men in some far-off land and then appeal to the patriotism of the folks at home. By such means are the minds of the people diverted from the pressing economic and social problems, the right solution of which is essential to the happiness of the toilers of the nation.

There is no justification in history for the imperial course upon which we have entered. Rather, every page in history is a warning to us—that we desist before it is too late. And why should we not desist? What reason can be given for our imperial policy save the desire of the ruling class to plunder and invest?

The area of this country is great enough, if we would maintain free institutions under a republican form of government, for in a republic, founded upon the principles of equality and universal suffrage, it is essential that the individual voter shall have a knowledge of, and be familiar with, the methods of government; and if the country is so great and the problems of government are so complicated that it is impossible for the individual voter to acquire this familiar knowledge, how is it possible for him to vote intelligently? How is it possible for him to know that by his vote he is maintaining free institutions? In the past, republics have been of quite limited area—a single city perhaps—with a comparatively small population. The founders of this government, recognizing the difficulty of maintaining as a unit a republic of extensive proportions, inaugurated the Federal system, a union of sovereign states, hoping thereby to extend self-government over vast areas and to maintain at the same time the purity of republican principles by making each sovereign state a free republic.

For the purpose of unifying a vast area within the bounds of a republic it was enacted that the central government, the Government of the United States, should

be a government of limited powers, a government possessing only such powers as were conferred upon it by the Constitution. All other sovereign rights—all other powers common to a sovereign—were retained by the States themselves, or by the people themselves as inhabitants of the States. If we follow our present policy of acquiring tropical countries, where republics cannot live, and where free, self-governing people have never lived since the world had a history, we overturn the theory upon which this government was established.

The whole theory of our government precludes centralization of power; the whole theory of our government sustains the idea that the United States as a government shall only do those things which cannot be done with equal effectiveness by the states or by the individual citizens.

But our Federal system has not accomplished the purpose for which it was created; it has not fulfilled the expectation of its authors.

Before we acquire more territory; before we start on a policy of imperialism and of conquest, it is our duty to inquire whether our area and population are not already too great. Centralization went on rapidly after the War of the Rebellion. It was hastened by the Spanish War. It received an immense impetus during the World War. As a result, our people are looking to the Government of the United States as the source of all power and the channel through which all relief must come. The American people have ceased to rely on the states. They are forgetting how to rely upon themselves.

This concentration of power in the hands of the Federal Government has been followed by encroachments by the Federal courts upon the sovereignty of the states and upon the legislative and executive branches of the government itself, until a point has been reached in our public life where the courts are almost supreme.

Within the past fifty years the wealth of the United

States, which was once fairly distributed, has been accumulated in the hands of a few, so that five per cent of the people own three-quarters of the nation's wealth, while two-thirds of the citizens — the workers — are practically without property. Recent events point unmistakably to the fact that the few men who own nearly all the wealth have gained control of the machinery of public life. They have usurped the functions of government and established a plutocracy.

Those who favor an imperial policy for the United States, who favor a departure from those customs and practices that have created the proudest pages in our history, say it is manifest destiny. Throughout all recorded time manifest destiny has been the murderer of men.

Manifest destiny has caused the strong to rob the weak and has reduced the weak to slavery. Manifest destiny built the feudal castle and supplied the feudal lord with his serfs. Manifest destiny compelled republics to go forth and conquer weaker races and to subject the conquered people to slavery; to impose taxation against their will, and to inflict upon them forms of government which they considered odious. Manifest destiny is the cry of the strong in justification of their plunder of the weak. This cry sent forth the nations of Europe to divide among them the weaker nations of Africa and Asia.

If we pursue the course to which "manifest destiny" is alluring us; if we annex weaker nations to which we cannot apply our system of government; if we acquire territory in the Tropics where men cannot live who are capable of self-government, then republican forms cannot exist in those distant possessions. The vigorous blood, the best blood, the young men of our land, will be drawn away to mix with distant races and to hold them in subjection. Gradually the reflex of the conquest and of this tyrannical government will work its effect upon our own people, and free institutions will disappear from this land, as well

as from the land we conquer and undertake to hold in subjection.

Whenever England concludes to go upon an expedition and plunder some of the weaker nations of the world, she makes her first appeal to patriotism. Then, step by step, she goes on until she has committed the wrong, has transgressed the rights of the natives; has aroused their resistance, and then she declares that the flag has been fired on, and that no Englishman must question the right or wrong of what is being done until the enemy is defeated and the country annexed.

Contemplate the course of every republic in the past; watch its surrender to the lust of power and the greed for wealth; then turn to our own shores, examine our present conduct and see our flag go down in misery and in shame. The glory of this republic has been that we have offered an asylum to the oppressed and a hope to mankind which has been followed wherever freedom has flowered throughout the world. Shall we stain that record? Shall we abandon history? Shall we become one of the robber nations of the world?

The United States is on the wrong course—the course that leads to national disgrace and finally to national destruction. The wealth lords who desire imperialism are not the American people. The jingoes and exploiters who are out for conquest and for annexation are not the American people. They are merely the representatives of a ruling class that would use the American people to fill their own money bags.

We have a task—clear and well defined.

Our duty is to educate and elevate the population we already have, and thus perpetuate our institutions. In the past every republic has sown the seeds of its final destruction by gratifying the desire for conquest and for glory. Let us profit by their example and pursue a course that will make the masses happy and prosperous rather than dazzle and allay the mutterings of misery and discontent by the march of armies and the glory of conquest.