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It is a serious and difficult alternative, that which the British minister and the German emperor have thrust upon President Roosevelt.

If he accepts their offer to submit the Venezuelan question to his arbitration, he risks involving his country in complications which it is his duty to guard her against. If on the other hand, he declines their offer, then he becomes in a way apparently responsible for a wanton war that may be prosecuted to the extent of involving her in complications even more distressing than any that might result from his acceptance.

The choice is not a simple one. Unlike every other great question that has confronted Mr. Roosevelt since his accession to the presidency, and all that confronted his predecessor, it cannot be put to the test of the few great principles that have constituted our national ideals and our moral code. It presents purely a question of administrative expediency, upon which national ideals and moral concepts cast but little light. The dilemma is one of statecraft and diplomacy rather than one of patriotism and morality. For that reason a mistake will not be a crime, and Mr. Roosevelt, whichever way he may decide, will have a degree of sympathy that his strenuous career as an imperialist has not commanded.

There is no good reason for having forced this alternative upon Mr. Roosevelt. What the real motive may have been for refusing to go before The Hague tribunal, as Mr.

Roosevelt has requested the belligerent powers to do, it would be useless to speculate upon; but the reported reason, that The Hague tribunal has no power to enforce its decrees, is no reason at all. Arbitrators never have such power, or, if they happen to have it, they are not expected to use it. The Hague tribunal would have the same power to enforce its decree against Venezuela, should it decide against her, as to enforce it against Great Britain and Germany should it decide against them, namely, the power of the world's opinion. The primary object of international arbitration is not to enforce decrees. It is to settle disputes. When an award is made, the successful nation will find it no more difficult to enforce her claim which has now the sanction of an impartial tribunal as just, than she would have had to enforce it when its justice was disputed and in doubt; while the unsuccessful nation, if too weak or too fair to resist the award, has the satisfaction of knowing that she is not being bullied into submitting to injustice and indignity, but is acquiescing in the judgment of an independent tribunal.

Only a little reflection is necessary, therefore, to understand the absurdity of one of the objections to Mr. Roosevelt's becoming the arbitrator. It is argued that if he decides against Venezuela it will be incumbent upon the United States to enforce his award. Yet no one thinks of hinting that if he should decide against Germany and Great Britain it would be incumbent upon the United States to compel them to abide by that decision. True, it may be assumed that they would submit and therefore that no one would be needed to enforce an adverse award. But why jump to the conclusion that Venezuela would not do so if the award were against her?

She might not be able to pay a money indemnity out of hand; but if required to pay more than she were able, why infer that she would refuse to negotiate a fair settlement? It is to be feared that much of this talk about the necessity the United States would be under of enforcing a decision against Venezuela—which it is somewhat prematurely assumed President Roosevelt would make—is another indication of the restless spirit of American imperialism. The monopolists of this country are as hungry for South American territory as are those of Great Britain and Germany with "me too" Italy thrown in. They would be well pleased if Destiny were to take such a turn as to make it our pious Duty to civilize Venezuela out of her tempting lands.

An important step has been taken by the tariff reform committee of the New York Reform club, which has been almost quiescent for several years, though in the early 90's it did much excellent free trade work. It has decided to call a tariff conference at New York during the coming year to which "representative free trade men from various parts of the Union" are to be invited. One particularly encouraging thing about this matter is the honest boldness with which the term "free trade" is now used by the Reform club. Nothing is to be gained in any agitation vitalized by a principle, either by honest timidity or disingenuous evasion in declaring its purpose.

In the discussion which led up to the decision to call this tariff conference of free traders, ex-Congressman John DeWitt Warner placed the issue squarely as one between protection on the one hand and free trade on the other. That does not mean that in legislation the whole tariff must be at once abolished or nothing