

COLONIAL AMERICANS

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THE question I here set myself is whether all Americans realize the independence of their country.

Let us begin at the other end, by saying that Britons do not consider Americans foreigners. Legally, of course, they are; but when the ordinary Briton speaks of foreigners, he thinks not of Americans but of persons who do not speak English. Socially and practically he considers an American to be another sort of English-speaking person, like the Scotsman, Welshman or Irishman. Politically, however, he recognizes the complete independence of the United States. One should apologize for the lack of "news" in this statement. It is made only because some Americans are not yet awake to it, as we shall see. I may say that I never saw or heard of any Briton out of the lunatic asylums who thought that the United States owed any duty to Great Britain, or should assist her in any British matter. Almost never do Britons use the term "mother country" about the relationship of their land to the United States, although there is no good reason for the abstention. They feel that the United States is in a totally different category from the Dominions, and talk of it in a different way. There is no disposition in Britain to look upon the United States as anything but an entirely independent power, with its own interests and policies, like Russia or China. And all Britons, with possible exceptions in strait-jackets, declare readily that the United States has a greater industrial and financial power and can exert a stronger military force than their own country when it chooses. Nor, out of the circle of mental defectives, is there anything but goodwill toward the United States, although popular knowledge of things American is by no means as full as it might be with advantage.

We now return to this side of the Atlantic, and to American opinion of relations with Great Britain. A Briton who comes to the United States will find that he too is not thought of as a foreigner, but merely as an Englishman, Scotsman, Irishman or Welshman. For to Americans also, in ordinary intercourse, a foreigner means a person who does not speak English as his native tongue; and everywhere our Briton goes, he will be as welcome as he deserves and he will find that there is no feeling at all against Englishmen as such in the United States. But let the topic of Great Britain as a political power come up, and our visitor will get some surprises. He will find that the members of the present

administration in the United States are as friendly as possible toward his own country; he will read many editorials in the newspapers which are eminently fair toward Great Britain, and he will see that most persons of the middle class take the same attitude. He will soon realize that the average American has too much to do to concern himself with British affairs, which is perfectly natural. In brief, he will discover that responsible elements in the United States have a reasonable view of American relations with Great Britain, and that some Americans understand British problems better than most Britons understand peculiarly American problems.

Now we come to our difficulty; our visitor will not go far before he meets evidence of rather loud minorities to whom his country, called invariably "England", is different in no good way from other countries of the world. He will find this opinion at its loudest in the utterances of the isolationists before the Pearl Harbor event, and of their survivors since. We may take the liberty of examining some of their effusions. They said that the visit of the King and Queen to Washington in 1939 was a trick to recapture the United States for the British Empire; although if the royal pair had remained away, the same people would have complained to Heaven of the snobbery. When war broke out in 1939, the isolationists cried "Why should the United States help in English wars? Is the United States a Dominion? Let God save the King, the Yanks aren't coming"; and they went to work to find much more fault with Great Britain than ever they had done with the states of the Axis. Now, we may ask, who said that the United States was a British Dominion, or should help in British wars? Absolutely nobody said it, or thought it, except the isolationists themselves; they were the only ones even to entertain the idea that the United States could be a Dominion. They did not protest that the United States was not a French Dominion, let God save France. They took independence from France for granted, but were uneasy about their independence from Great Britain. That is, they still had a trace of the colonial mentality.

They were very strong in the belief that the United States should never concern itself with anything out of its immediate interests; and if smaller countries were overrun by Axis states, that was too bad, but was no business of the United States. Strangely enough, they did not grant Great Britain the privilege of minding its own business; they chastised England all over the press and the platform for not helping Ethiopia, Spain, Austria,

Czechoslovakia, Poland. When the war broke out and Britain was trying to help Poland, they changed their tune only slightly; and they denounced England for letting down that country, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and, finally, France. In the autumn of 1940 they found that England was letting China down by closing the Burma road temporarily; and in the summer of 1941 England was letting Russia down by not throwing her forces on the continent at once. England, it seems, was always letting someone down! If England did not promptly and successfully rescue all the nations assailed by the Axis, she must have sinister selfish interests to serve, which the isolationists were pleased to reveal in several ways.

Now running through all this apparent abuse there was an assumption worth noting; that England was able to help all the distressed nations of the world, and should devote her energies to it. That is, England was still the mother country, the universal protector. She was not a mother who was living up to her job, but essentially she was a mother. If on occasion she did protect some intended victim, there would be no comment, for was not that her natural duty? Surely this touching faith in Britain's rôle in the world is purely and whole-heartedly colonial, and shows that simple colonialism is far from dead in the United States. Working from this cherished belief, the isolationists said nothing whatever about British successes in the war, but trumpeted long and loud about British reverses. Again, this was a wholly logical policy; British successes were the natural thing, requiring no comment, but British failures were such news that they required much publicity. The attitude again is thoroughly colonial, and could not be bettered in St. Helena or Kenya; but we must protest that Great Britain does not deserve these compliments, and cannot live up to the rôle of benevolence and power so fondly ascribed to her.

These isolationists, of course, like no sport better than finding fault with anything and everything British; but let a Briton express an adverse opinion on anything American, and they shouted to the skies "How rude, how unfair!" The assumption was that criticism from Great Britain implied maternal superiority and supervision of American habits and the isolationists had all the sensitiveness of the teen-age boy undergoing a lecture from a parent. For this reason fault-finding by a Briton was different from fault-finding by a South American or a Chinese, which could be dealt with on its merits; and again let us notice the simple colonial attitude of those who took this view.

Even Mr. Willkie, who is not isolationist but a consistent advocate of co-operation with the allies in the war, has a touch of the same malady. He is sure that Great Britain is doing wrong by India and by the Jews in respect of Palestine, and published his opinion to the world; but he issues a strident and quite unnecessary warning to British officials to take no semblance of a side in American politics in this year 1944. On the face of it, this looks like bullying of a peculiarly offensive variety, like the attitude of the Nazis who find fault with every country but their own and cry to High Heaven of the insult if anyone finds fault with them. But Mr. Willkie is no Nazi; he is a good American and democrat. Why is he so liberal with unasked advice on British problems and so sensitive about British advice on American problems? Because, like any son, he feels free to point out what he considers his mother's shortcomings, and like any son he resents the implication of parental control if the old lady reminds him of his failings. Fine man that he is, Mr. Willkie is still something of a colonial.

We may proceed now to the common and quite incorrect statement in American circles that Great Britain spares her own soldiers and sacrifices those of the Dominions in her battles. This assertion is made by practically no inhabitant of the Dominions; but it crops out in the States as often as a new issue of postage stamps commemorative of something or other, and it supports itself persistently by the example of Dieppe and the losses of the first Canadian division. The writer has met no Canadian who complains of the employment of Canadian troops there, the only action of the first division in three years, while home and other Dominion troops were fighting on every front; but he has met quite a few Americans who are sure that Great Britain threw the burden of the affair on the Canadians to save her own men. On the face of it, this looks like pure impertinence, and an unprovoked and malignant intrusion into other people's affairs. Properly understood, however, it is nothing of the kind. It merely indicates a feeling that Great Britain is so strong and chivalrous that she ought to take practically the whole of the Empire's burden on her own shoulders, like a good and powerful mother.

The opinion extends also to matters of food. When butter ran short in Buffalo last summer, many worthy people blamed lend-lease, and pointed an accusing finger at Great Britain as the cause of the shortage; and some were even sure that they had discovered American butter in Canada, where the commodity is

always to be had in exchange for the required coupons. The Briton might be excused for thinking this outcry the product of an ineradicable spite toward his own country, but let us assure him that it is not. It springs from a feeling that Great Britain has naturally so much of everything that she needs practically no help, which is a simple colonial faith. Of course the lease-lend officials soon explained that butter had not gone to Great Britain but to Russia; and the complaint subsided, because Russia never had been a provident mother to American colonies and has a right to some deficiencies.

When a wrong report got abroad in the United States Senate recently that American troops in the forthcoming invasion of Europe would outnumber Britons three to one, Senator Nye waxed indignant over the inequality. Shortly thereafter the *Chicago Tribune*, which is not really happy unless it is finding fault with Great Britain, declared that she is not doing nearly enough in the Pacific war. Of course neither senator nor paper saw a grievance for Britain in the small proportion of American troops in the Mediterranean area; for unconsciously they hold the theory that Great Britain should bear the burden in Europe and shoulder at least half the load in the Pacific. To imagine that she can do this is at least a magnificent tribute to a mother country from a colonial soul.

The most perfect compliment, however, to Great Britain's power comes from a well-known columnist who inclines to Russia's side in boundary questions and recently ascribed the foundation of the Baltic States to British intrigue. These States were established by Germany in 1918 after the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. But by the columnist's assumptions, in the year 1918 when Britain, France and the United States were engaged in a desperate struggle with Germany, British influence nevertheless was so great that it reached over the battle lines into the German Foreign Office and inspired the inmates to create Finland, Esthonia, Latvia and Lithuania on the ruins of the Tsarist Empire. Surely this implies much more than ordinary power, indeed almost omnipotence.

We may recall the common opinion in the United States that American ambassadors in London lose their heads and their hearts much more easily than in any other capital. By this theory the English introduce the ambassador to a duke and a duchess, and forthwith he becomes an ardent Briton and practically a member of the Cabinet that meets at No. 10 Downing Street. This is a quaint superstition with a romantic touch,

but does much less than justice to those able men and excellent patriots, the ambassadors. The fact is that in London they find out, if they did not know it before, that the common interests of the two countries are much more important than their differences, and that co-operation is to the benefit of both. Of a piece with this amusing superstition is the uneasy feeling in the minds of some worthy Americans that, in fighting side by side with Great Britain, they may become a catspaw for some British interest, although they have no suspicion that their alliance with Russia makes them a catspaw for that country. Both the superstition and the feeling indicate a lack of confidence in American patriotism and diplomatic ability, a sense of inferiority which is nothing but pure colonialism.

Of course this sentiment is not the only source of anti-British agitation in the United States. Some of it is due to mere "crankiness" and wandering of the mind. The United States is a large country, and the number of its feeble-minded, although not out of proportion to the population, is bound to be considerable. It is easier in the United States than in any other country for such persons to express themselves in print, and when they have feelings on the subject of "England", they can publish without difficulty. There are elements friendly to the Axis who try to create discord between the great English-speaking communities by finding fault with Great Britain at every opportunity; and there are racial groups with hereditary grudges who would be utterly lost if they could not throw bricks at England. Taken all together, nevertheless, these people are only a small minority; and when the average American speaks ill of Great Britain, he is not malicious, but is merely displaying his innate colonialism. He wants to be reassured; he will accept any adequate explanation of his difficulty, and will be happy if a Briton will only express a high opinion of some American achievement, thereby restoring his self-esteem.

Mr. Churchill predicted that in this election year many hard things would be said about Great Britain in the United States; but no Briton, understanding the motive behind most of the abuse, will take offence at it. It is merely the way in which some Americans bolster an imperfect belief in the independence of their country, a sort of whistling in the dark to keep up their political courage. The reader will know that all mature-minded Americans, the great majority, will rate this agitation at its proper value; and he will know that his correct policy is to ignore it and to continue to express his liking for things American,

which will be the complete answer. The jubilee of George V and the coronation of George VI were followed with sympathetic attention in the United States, and in 1939 the King and Queen were made thoroughly welcome. When Great Britain beat off the Nazi air force in 1940, Americans were generous in their tributes to British courage and skill; and when British cities were laid waste by bombs in the ensuing winter, American sympathy was intense and took the form of abundant relief to the sufferers. All the clamor of the isolationists did not prevent the average American from understanding in 1941 that the countries were in a common danger and must sink or swim together. Most Americans understand now that their best interests and those of the British Empire will be served by a continued close collaboration. The heart and mind of the average American are sound; he suffers fools patiently, but knows better than to take them as guides. The good relations of the English-speaking countries need not be disturbed by the running criticism of "England" from American minorities, who are merely choosing their peculiar way of expressing a simple and abiding faith in the power, generosity and wisdom of Great Britain, a colonialism much deeper than that of the humblest members of the British Empire.