

GERMANY'S "BLUFF" AND THE COLONIES PROBLEM

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"HISTORY repeats itself" is an old adage, made no less true by over-frequent repetition. Sixty years ago the solid figure of a Prussian junker dominated Europe. To-day Bismarck's place is taken by another German, more given to fanatical ranting, and once more nations wonder when and where Germany will march again.

Herr Hitler and his partisans have talked of many things; there has been much mention of a mission to the world; their phrases have referred frequently to German minorities under foreign domination, sometimes with a note of longing, but more often with menace. Prophecies have been fulfilled; Germany has re-armed; the Rhineland is no longer demilitarized; Austria is now a part of greater Germany; Czechoslovakia has been broken on the wheel. All these things shall come to pass, said Hitler,—and they have come to pass, while troubled European chancelleries sought to check the advance by indecisive attempts at intervention.

One of the most constant demands made by Germany is for the return of the colonies which she, as the vanquished, lost after the World War,—colonies in themselves of no great value beside the vast overseas empires of Britain, France, and the Netherlands, or compared to the limitless resources of the United States and the U. S. S. R.; yet Germany believes they are colonies worth 100 billion gold marks; more, she declares, than her own present national wealth. Is this a requirement that Hitler will seek to fulfil in the same manner as he has satisfied other German needs—by swift and direct use of force? Germany's demands seem to aim directly at Britain and France, for the Fuehrer has clearly stated that Germany has no colonial claims against countries which have taken no colonies away from her. Yet Britain and France have been very loath to offer any concession. Peaceful solution failing, will Hitler resort to war? He has said the colonial question is not to be settled by arms, but his promises have been shown false on previous occasions.

The colonial problem may be discussed from a dozen different points of view. It can be said that Germany may

obtain her raw materials freely in world markets. To that plea Hitler responds that such purchase is essential, but is possible only when Germany can sell more of her own goods; colonies would provide a market. It may be argued that Germany failed to develop her colonies before the war; yet that is no proof that she would fail to do so now. It may be pointed out that the former German colonies are not rich, and do not produce many raw materials of the type Germany needs; they are rich enough to help the precarious German economy, Hitler answers. On February 20th of this year he told the Reichstag, "There exists no recipe in world economics which can offer a full substitute for the possibility of an intensive economic system within a territory having the same currency."

Fundamentally it may be a matter of prestige for Germany, a sop to throw to a hungry nation which, for the moment, is suckling glory. The German Colonial League has issued a statement containing the words: "We need our colonies, and we are going to have them." The German people have been assured by their leader that owing to "the impossible nature of the space allotted to Germany" the claim for colonial possessions will be issued from year to year with constantly increasing vigour.

Hitherto, most of us have taken this very seriously, and we have been well advised. Hitler is not a man to be trifled with. Yet, return now to the opening adage, "History repeats itself". It was only a little over 50 years ago that Germany, under the guidance of the iron-willed Bismarck, began to acquire those colonies over whose loss she is now so perturbed. There is a lesson in the policy that Germany then pursued. Bismarck had no faith in extensive colonial empires or vast overseas possessions. For him, Prussian greatness in the past and German glory in the future were inextricably linked with a purely continental policy. The Reich would only be weakened by the dissipation of strength in overseas expansion at a time when Europe itself was far from stable; a more compact destiny was intended for Germany.

Yet of a sudden in 1884 Bismarck made a bid for African possessions, and within a few months Germany found herself with a colonial empire. This was no vain aping of other powers, for Bismarck was not the man to pursue humbly courses already mapped out by foreign nations. It has, however, been suggested that it was a policy forced upon Bismarck by a few economic imperialists, whose dreams of German greatness

were mingled with schemes of personal wealth. Yet again, Bismarck was scarcely of the type to be influenced against his better judgment. What seems much more likely is that Bismarck was holding fast to his original belief in a European Germany only, and that the bid for colonies was not seriously intended as an imperial move, but was merely a support for one branch of the German foreign policy in Europe.

Bismarck had several aims. One of them was to keep France isolated, so that no alliance against Germany might be constructed. A second was to develop friendly relations again with France after the defeat in 1870, so that Germany need not fear an enemy on her western frontier. This policy of conciliating a defeated rival had been pursued with success after 1866, when Germany, having vanquished Austria, promptly made friends with her. The German mind, however, seems to act in terms of contrasts: it was in Germany that this dialectic evolved so successfully as a part of modern philosophy. In short, when Germany thought of friendship she thought also of enmity, and the establishment of friendly relations with one power naturally carried with it opposition to another. Britain was the nation that was on the receiving end of the enmity. At this time Britain and France were deeply immersed in colonial rivalry, and had on more than one occasion almost come to blows. French Algerian expansion in the middle of the century had perturbed London. English usurpation of control in Egypt had fanned French jealousy. Observing this, Bismarck felt that he might forward his policy by establishing a community of interest with France if he could openly have difficulties with England in the colonial sphere.

With this in mind, caring little for colonies himself, he set out deliberately to provoke Britain. He was careful to choose a region where there was no possibility of trampling on the preserves of any other nation. The unclaimed coastal section of Africa, later known as Southwest Africa, between the British Cape Colony and Portugese Angola, was where he made his first stand. England had stated that this district was not British; because the Cape did not feel ready to bear the expenses of governing any new territory there, the Government in London had avoided any seizure. Yet Britain did not look with equanimity on the prospect of any other powerful nation establishing itself close to the Cape. So while announcing that she did not want the territory herself, she said she did not wish anyone else to own it.

The dog in the manger is never popular, and Britain had left herself open to criticism by such an unsatisfactory attitude. Bismarck saw his chance, and announced to the British Government that Angra Pequena, the central area on that section of the coast, was henceforth under German protection. At the same time he turned to France, having shown the community of interest as planned, and practically offered to Courcel, the French Ambassador in Berlin, a colonial agreement aimed at Britain.

The British error had been in adopting a rather equivocal position, failing to make intentions clear. Cape Colony, in great fear, hastened to promise that she would assume responsibility for Southwest Africa, excluding Angra Pequena as claimed by Germany. In a verbal agreement on this basis between the British foreign secretary and the German attaché, an arrangement maintaining the *status quo* was made. The Cape announced publicly that she intended to annex the whole of the coast, up to Angola, excluding the small German territory. Then suddenly Bismarck did his best to provoke England's anger again, by proclaiming that Germany was taking the whole region under her protection, disregarding the earlier claim made by Cape Colony; at the same time he again pressed for some agreement with France.

Bismarck had miscalculated in two respects. Britain did not object as strenuously as he had expected. British policy, controlled by the polite and pacific Granville and by Derby, whose constant and universal suspicions led him to favour inaction, was definitely a policy of peace, and Bismarck suddenly found himself with an almost unwelcome colony on his hands. In the second place, France proved harder to woo than he had calculated. He was not yet convinced that his policy was a failure, so he tried a new campaign against England, with the same goal of attracting France. Successively he raised a fuss over New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, East Africa, and West Africa, later the German Cameroons. On each occasion Britain held fast to a course of peace and moderation, and to Bismarck's disgust gave in to him. By the end of 1885, Bismarck found that he had, within a few months, unexpectedly acquired a colonial empire. Meanwhile, France, in no hurry to forget or forgive the dishonour of 1870, and suspicious of the aggressive "blood and iron" policy of the German Government, had come no closer to Germany. Bismarck, distracted

by the outbreak of troubles in Europe's storm centre, the Balkans, was forced to drop his policy of reconciliation.

Can we find a parallel to-day in Hitler's demand for colonies? Certainly not in respect to a reconciliation with France, for France controls some of the territories which the Führer seems anxious to regain. Yet there may be a similarity in that his colonial demands were at first merely an incidental feature of a policy predominantly European; the cry for the return of Germany's lost empire may have been a bargaining point—one which Hitler did not need to press to a conclusion, but which he would give up in return for some concession from Britain or France, such as a guaranteed free hand in central and south-eastern Europe. He practically obtained this, and now has returned to the colonial demands.

Yet, Hitler has in general held very closely to the ideas he outlined when in prison, in *Mein Kampf*. In that, his statement of his beliefs, aims, and political philosophy, he made it very clear that he felt colonies would be a weakness to Germany, and that it was not part of his scheme to seek them for her. Rosenberg, the Nazi latter-day prophet, in his more or less official text-book on German foreign policy, speaks of giving up the crusading policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II, and concentrating on the acquisition of territory in Eastern Europe. Germany wants to be dominant, and menacing. A great continental bloc, including much of Central and Eastern Europe ruled from Berlin, would be far more dangerous than the present Germany increased by a few scattered overseas possessions.

On the other hand, one must admit the possibility of a change in Hitler's point of view; the recent German enthusiasm for colonies is very newly formed indeed; its vigour may be an evidence of its genuine character. Even if presented originally as a bolster to a European policy, the fervour of the propaganda in Germany and the intensive nature of the campaign seem to have created a popular temper which will not permit the Führer to lessen, much less relinquish, his search for overseas possessions.