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WHY ENGLAND LOST HER AMERICAN COLONIES

"The most ominous political sign in the United States to-day is the growth of a sentiment which either doubts the existence of an honest man in public office or looks on him as a fool for not seizing his opportunities."—HENRY GEORGE, "Progress and Poverty," p. 483.

Tyranny of English Colonial Administration before America Rebelled—Contrast with Present-Day Relations

AT the time of the English Revolution of 1688, when William III. ascended the throne, England's American colonies contained about 200,000 white men of overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon character. These were being daily taught that it mattered little to them whether the government at home was republican or monarchical, Protestant or Catholic, high-church or low-church, Whig or Tory. The Crown was perpetually in need of money to meet the cost of foreign wars, and public sentiment had not been educated to the point of regarding the Englishman of Virginia or Massachusetts as in all respects the peer of the Englishman at home.

Toward the end of the seventeenth century, the English Government applied to its colonial trade political maxims even less liberal than those which the Stuarts

had countenanced. In 1696 American trade was limited to ships built in England or the colonies, owned and manned by Englishmen. The colonists were forbidden to trade otherwise than with the mother country. In 1699, the weavers of England secured an act of Parliament which forbade the colonies shipping wool to the mother country, or even from one colony to the other. The export of lumber was limited. Trees suitable for masts could not be felled without royal permission. In 1719 Parliament forbade the American colonies to manufacture articles of iron excepting nails, staples, and the like. It was frankly proclaimed in the Lower House that to permit manufacturing in America was to encourage separation from the mother country; and while it was found practically impossible wholly to suppress iron-works in America, the manufacture was checked as much as possible, and a large tax was raised on the export of manufactured iron.

This must be strange reading for many of our politicians who have persistently advocated heavy taxes on imports for the sake of protecting so-called "infant industries."

Manufacturing of all kinds was deliberately stopped in America, in so far as the Government could secure respect for its laws. Fortunately this left plenty of room for contraband operations and postponed the day of reckoning. Had England, toward the end of the seventeenth century, been able to enforce against the colonies her own acts of Parliament with the thoroughness of modern Germany or even Russia, no doubt the Revolutionary War of 1776 would have taken place three-quarters of a century earlier.

In 1716 there were already five printing presses and three newspapers in Boston, and these openly defied the attempted censorship of the mother country. The history of America proceeds from now on in a constant repetition of efforts at encroachment on the part of the Crown, evasion and defiance on the side of the colonists. As England under the Georges became more blindly monarchical, the Americans became more and more conscious of their strength, and urged with even more emphasis than before their right to self-government. The bad blood existing between New England and the mother country was the principal reason why Canada remained so long in French hands, for the men of Massachusetts could not become enthusiastic in military enterprises which promised only the strengthening of an unfriendly military power in their neighborhood.

As events turned out, however, the session of Canada to England in 1763 relieved the thirteen colonies at once from large military expenses which had been hitherto necessary in order to resist French attacks. From 1763 on, the political thinkers in America realized that the field of their operations was no longer limited by French military posts, which cut off their Hinterland and held them prisoners between the Alleghanies and the Atlantic. Henceforth an American combination against England meant the whole of North America from Labrador to the Gulf of Mexico, and as far west as man then had knowledge of.

In that Seven Years War which closed in 1763, Americans had fought side by side with British regu-

lars, had seen British generals exhibit gross military incapacity. George Washington and the other Americans who in 1775 took up arms against England, were men who had learned to be soldiers in a school of arms that experience had proved to be—at least on American soil—more valuable than that which produced the generals of George III.

One cannot read the history of England, in her relations to America during the latter half of the eighteenth century, without being on every page reminded of South Africa and the spread of Boer influence between 1896 and 1900.

Not to follow out in detail what I have already touched upon elsewhere, it is sufficient to refer to the almost universal ignorance which prevailed in England regarding the Boers at the opening of the South African War in 1899. A general commanding English troops loudly proclaimed in September that he would eat his Christmas dinner in Pretoria! Yet Christmas of 1900 found the war still going on!

Even English historians now freely chronicle the manner in which official England in the days of George III. spoke of Americans as cowards, incapable of organization and resistance. There were liberal-minded men then who courageously defended colonial liberties, but their voices were drowned in the general howl of the ignorant and the interested. American public men in those days knew the mother country intimately—her strength and her weakness. Englishmen, on the contrary, knew of America only so much as the average share-holder cares to learn about a country in which one of his many investments happens to be.

Great changes have taken place since then, never so signally emphasized as in the year 1900, when the colonies of Australia sent their delegates to the mother country to discuss ways and means of closer political intercourse. They came as honored guests of the nation; were made the occasion of countless flattering functions, and at the hands of the Government were treated not as colonial suppliants, but as ambassadors of sovereign communities.

To-day English colonies bare their arms for fight in the cause of Old England, and even Americans have produced a pendant to the Monroe Doctrine in the significant aphorism that "blood is thicker than water."

In this year English and American sailors and soldiers are fighting side by side in China. In 1898, Admiral Dewey found that when the war with Spain broke out, the only hand extended to wish him God speed, when starting on his desperate mission to Manila, was that of the English sailor.

Now let us travel back to the days when in the American colonies political life produced public men great in their generation and greater still when measured by the shrunken standards of our latter-day Congressmen.

When Benjamin Franklin went to England as an Englishman, demanding the rights of Englishmen, asking no strange favor, but appealing to the Government of his King for justice according to ancient charters and many generations of prescription, he and others on the same errand of peace were treated by the court, the aristocracy, members of the Government, and the majority of politicians as contemptible agita-

tors unfit for association on terms of equality with the so-called society of the metropolis.

England was drunk with the glory of her past wars; her power had made her blind; money easily made had corrupted the sources of legislation; ignorance and indifference had done the rest.

Seven long years did the thirteen colonies fight the mother country to establish a principle which has proved a precious boon to every British colony since that time. The War of Independence closed in 1783, but in 1812 another three years' war broke out, which but proved once more that even the best British regulars are but poor stuff against men of English breeding fighting for principle. It took these ten years of good, hard knocks to teach England the lesson which to-day makes her the colonial mistress of the world.

Canada was the first to profit by the surrender of Yorktown, but each colony in turn felt the effect of this blow, and now, wherever the English flag floats throughout the world, it represents either a self-governing Anglo-Saxon community or at least one in which the natives enjoy as much of self-government as it is safe to accord.