
The Threat of International Chaos

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The Threat of International Chaos

By FRANCIS NEILSON

THERE ARE MANY SIGNALS flashing warning lights on the horizons of international frontiers. To me these indicate it is time that we take seriously considered counsel of what should be done to bring some order into world affairs. It is no time to dally with statistical tables and plans for forming groups to do what groups have never been able to do. That period is past. If we have not learned since the demise of the League of Nations (of sorry memory) that all the beautiful notions of community feeling among nations wilted away long before there were rumors of a second World War, we shall never know the reason for our present plight.

Anglo-American Frictions

IT IS ONLY OCCASIONALLY that I find in our daily journals echoes of the bitter controversies that are taking place on the other side of the Atlantic. Sometimes cartoons from foreign newspapers are reproduced here, and they indicate rather clearly what is thought about our participation in foreign politics. Recently in the British papers there has been another extended correspondence arising from the complaints of American visitors about disturbing factors they encountered this year.

One lady, in a long letter, criticized nearly everything from the management of her hotel to the passengers in an omnibus. Most of the matters that got on her nerves were rather trivial and scarcely worth the space they occupied in the columns of *The Times*. Still, beneath these protests about conditions in England and Paris, there is a deep undercurrent of dissatisfaction, which affects the relationships of the people of several countries. It is to the causes of these acrimonious manifestations, causes which are economic as well as sociological, that I would draw attention.

It seems to me to be our duty to examine the reasons for these frictions, since they affect the body and soul of the people who speak the English tongue. We can no longer, like ostriches, bury our heads in the sand. This matter is of grave concern, and if we have not the courage now to investigate the reasons for it and strive to find a means of solving it, the Europe we have known will crumble beneath our feet, and its people be plunged into a chaos worse than war itself.

These problems cannot be resolved by the stratagems of the chancelleries, nor can they be mitigated by Foreign Secretaries. Meetings of Big

Threes and Big Fours have not yet produced a workable scheme for even lessening the frictions that have troubled their minds since the Entente was hailed as a blessing in 1904. The history of peace-making is extant and anyone who desires to know the futility of the process can read it for himself. After Westphalia—war. After Waterloo—war. After 1870—bitterness, the desire for revenge, more preparations for war. And so it goes, generation after generation. Georg Brandes, in his book, *The World at War*,¹ says:

Victor Cherbuliez once calculated that from the year 1500 B.C. to about 1860 A.D. about eight thousand peace treaties had been signed, each one supposed to secure permanent peace and each one lasting on an average two years.²

Politicians make wars, but a durable peace is beyond their power, for it has been demonstrated over and over again that their treaties contain the germs of wars to come. We must look to the people themselves to find another way out of this dreadful business. Political ideals of peace have lost their lustre. Indeed, the conditions of the peace and the consequences of its terms are so far different from the ideals for which the war was fought that one who realizes the dangers which now prevail must conclude that madmen were in control of governments in 1939.

Anti-Americanism in Europe

IN *Life* MAGAZINE for October 12, 1953, there was published an article called "A Dangerous European Luxury: Hating America." It is from the pen of Bruce Hutchison, the astute editor of the *Times*, Victoria, British Columbia. He spent five months this summer in the countries of Western Europe gathering information about the frictions that disturb the people. The editor of *Life* is to be commended for having the courage to print it. Mr. Hutchison puts the matter in a nutshell, and his initial statement is so much to the point that it deserves to be read in full:

Probably the most important and certainly the most terrifying fact in the free world today is not Russia's strength, Europe's weakness or any thing that can be measured in statistics.

It is the dry rot, something intangible developing within the minds of nameless millions that is steadily undermining the friendship of the old world and the new, on which the fate of both must hang.

Among Europeans this phenomenon is called anti-Americanism, among Americans, gross ingratitude. It is much more complicated than simple prejudice. It is, in fact, a kind of psychic disease which, unless cured,

¹ New York, Macmillan, 1917.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 176.

could some day prove mortal, thereby confirming the prognosis of that distinguished political physician, the late Joseph Stalin.

In Europe and especially in Britain the quiet but bitter resentment against American policies and, worse, against American people is so deep and has grown so fast of late that statesmen hardly dare to discuss it in public and try to mask it with speeches and postures. This well-meaning conspiracy of concealment clearly is failing. Among the people, who in the end will decide everything, the U. S.'s moral leadership of the free world, the only kind of leadership that can possibly succeed, is in danger of collapse.

In considering this blunt statement, we should make a great mistake in thinking the situation is a crisis that has arisen since the close of World War II. To understand it properly, the student ought to begin his researches from the time when the European allies of the First World War became debtors to the United States. This is the economic aspect of it, and out of this arises the sociological one. The "gross ingratitude" we feel as a people, after all we did for England and France, to say nothing of Russia, is surely an indication of our naïvete so far as our participation in the affair is concerned. In private life, as a rule, the wise ones help without thinking of gratitude for favors received. Indeed, there are maxims enough in the schoolbooks about lending money to a friend whom you wish to be rid of. Polonius told Laertes:

Neither a borrower, nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.

This is not only sound for individuals; it is historically true for nations.

If we were to read the history of Europe since the days of Marlborough's Wars, we should learn that, once the war is over, the nations of the allied forces have ideas of their own, and not many decades must pass before they are fighting among themselves. During the Napoleonic campaigns, the money that Pitt lavished upon allies did England very little good, for after Waterloo the *London News* told its readers:

. . . It is a fact that peace, instead of having brought us security, retrenchment, relief from burthens, or extended commerce, to enable us to bear them, has left us all the expenses of war, without gaining to us the friendship of the very Powers for whom we undertook it. . . .

It then went on to remark that the country against which Britain fought "has come out of the contest with the least harm; and that which set all the rest in motion has suffered in the highest degree." That is merely one instance of economic and sociological disaster dogging the footsteps of war-minded politicians. For further examples of such stu-

pidity, I would recommend Jonathan Swift's works and particularly what he has to say about Marlborough's Wars in such inimitable satires as *A Tale of a Tub* and *The History of John Bull*.

The Changes in American Character

IT SHOULD BE REMEMBERED that, in foreign affairs, we as a nation have a practical experience of only thirty-six years. Our troubles began in the spring of 1917 when we became an active ally of Great Britain and France. Tacitly we had been an ally ever since 1897, when the understanding was made by John Hay to be at England's side in a war with Germany. Dr. Roland Usher mentions this fact in his book, *Pan-Germanism*, published in 1913. There are other works of that period that confirm the story about Hay's mission to London.

Should anyone want to know how far back our history goes in these affairs, he might study such books as *The Education of Henry Adams*. In this work he will be reminded on page after page of the amazing political changes that have taken place in a hundred years. Indeed, it is difficult for an old student like myself to connect the United States of today with that which existed when Henry Adams assisted his father at the Court of St. James. Can anyone imagine a Churchill or an Eden, an Attlee or a Morrison, delivering himself on a foreign country as John Bright did in March, 1863?

Privilege thinks it has a great interest in the American contest, and every morning with blatant voice, it comes into our streets and curses the American Republic. Privilege has beheld an afflicting spectacle for many years past. It has beheld thirty million of men happy and prosperous, without emperors—without king—without the surroundings of a court—without nobles, except such as are made by eminence in intellect and virtue—without State bishops and State priests, those vendors of the love that works salvation—without great armies and great navies—without a great debt and great taxes—and Privilege has shuddered at what might happen to old Europe if this great experiment should succeed.³

John Bright's description of America of a hundred years ago reads like a tale of some country described in *The Arabian Nights*. For myself, in the sixty-eight years of my experience here, I have seen three distinct changes of people. After the First World War, the native American was supplanted by a different type, and now since the Second World War, the apathy and ignorance that are prevalent everywhere are a sure indication that there has been a third grave change. The curious, acute, shrewd, independent man recognized everywhere as a Yankee has disappeared.

³ Quoted in *The Education of Henry Adams*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1918, p. 189.

The economic and sociological changes that have taken place in this country have been attributed to our system of education, the loss of home life, and lack of parental precept. These, however, are not only American; they are universal.

I have remarked before what it has meant to us as travelers to lose the sense of courtesy so much admired by Europeans in an American gentleman and gentlewoman when I was a boy. The bad manners referred to in Mr. Hutchison's article are noticeable everywhere in America today. One of our prominent educators told me that he did not look for respect from any student on his campus. Indeed, he was surprised when, infrequently, he was addressed as "Sir" or "Doctor."

I shall now try to reveal the contrasts I have noticed since I first came to America. When I returned to England in 1897, I had spent twelve years in the United States. I had worked with the roughest of the rough; penury was not unknown to me. But much of it was unnecessary, for I could have found work, but I was looking for a white-collar job. When I became an actor, I traveled from coast to coast, from Canada to the Gulf.

I was not long in England before I decided to stay there, as I had reached the top of my profession as a stage director of drama and opera.

For several years my intimate friends were American men and women, people I had met during the last few years of my stay in this country. Most of them were yearly visitors to England and the Continent. They were publishers, authors, journalists, industrialists, and merchants. In those days the American was envied by the English people. No one spoke of an ill-mannered "Yank." My friends were as urbane and courtly as Mr. Choate himself; and as for the women, whether they were novelists, actresses, or the wives of millionaires, they were, so far as I knew, admired by those who came in contact with them.

The only disturbance of the smooth stream of social relationships at that time was occasioned by three obstreperous American children at a famous hotel in London, which catered especially to Americans. I remember the incident distinctly. The children got into the reading room and slapped the newspapers out of the hands of readers, turned over chairs, yelled and shouted, kicked and screamed when the attendants were called to take them away. When the father learned from the manager what had taken place, he was deeply shocked, but the mother excused them, saying that she believed *the only way to rear children was to let them express themselves because that was the way their character was formed.*

Strangely enough, the victims of the conduct of the children were Americans staying at the hotel, and it was from one of them that I learned about the incident.

Anglo-American Friendship in Former Days

NOW, I COULD MENTION well-known names of American gentlemen who, at that time, believed Great Britain and America, firmly united in peaceful and cultural aims, would be a pattern to the rest of the world. Shortly after the turn of the century I began what I thought was my life's work—to further this purpose. My visits to America during the next twelve years were to produce plays and to lecture. One tour I made in 1912 extended from New York to Edmonton and Victoria, British Columbia, down the west coast, then into the Middle States and back to New York through Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. During this trip I spoke at colleges, universities, men's clubs, and literary societies. Not once did I get the impression that there was any reason for discord between the British and the Americans. And this was at a time when the diplomatic atmosphere of Europe was rife with rumors of war.

When I returned to London, I met the American Ambassador at a dinner given by a member of the Cabinet. He was keen to learn the impressions of my trip, and so pleased was he with my report that he said he would communicate it to the Secretary of State. A few years afterwards, ex-President Taft and I were staying at the same club in Boston, and I told him of my chat with the Ambassador and reminded him of the night that Sir Edward Grey introduced in the House his suggestion of Arbitration Treaties for settling international disputes. Mr. Taft was glad to hear that there was an influential number of men in the Commons ready to support his scheme, but he was aware that nothing could be done by the government because of the war feeling in Europe.

The First World War changed everything, and if we desire to know the truth about the matter, we have to go back to that disastrous affair for an understanding of the present condition.

In the autumn of 1915 I returned to America to remain here, and a few years afterwards I became naturalized. Since that time I have traveled year after year to Great Britain, the Continent, and the Near East, and I have also visited most of the countries of South America. I have never lost interest in the aim and purpose of the idea that I held at the beginning of the century about cementing the friendship between Britons and Americans. What seemed possible as an ideal fifty years ago appears in one's thought now as a preposterous notion. It seems farcical that any sensible

person could have fostered such an aim. The war changed all. Even before America was committed to sending troops to Europe, propaganda had divided the American people and set their minds in a turmoil. The shrewd, cautious, calculating Yankee had become an emotional victim of the war scribe. And I am convinced that this condition of mind exists today and that he is incapable of understanding clearly the grave problems his interference in European affairs has created.

Of course, it is a platitude to say that an Englishman can never understand an American and an American can never understand a Briton. Mr. Hutchison, in his article, suggests that much. But no one asks why. And strangely, it is since the First World War that this problem has become one of the most tantalizing conundrums put to our political mentors. It might be said that this condition existed before 1914. It did, but in a very different way. There were Americans then who could not understand English habits in social affairs and sport. Yet, the fun that was poked at England about the difference in customs did no harm. So it was with the whimsies of the English in *Punch* and other comic papers about the idiosyncrasies of Americans. It was good-natured satire. Alas, the cartoonist of today etches with a bitter pen, and the joke-cracker too often administers a drop of venom.

Behavior of American Forces of Occupation

IT IS QUITE TRUE, as Mr. Hutchison points out, that there is deep resentment in France and Great Britain against the way our troops live in the occupied areas and the way they behave in public places. But the exhibitions referred to in the article I am dealing with can be accepted only as aggravations of a bitterness that is embedded in the souls of the people who have to tolerate them. Mr. Hutchison writes:

The habits of American soldiery in Europe are as familiar as they are exaggerated. You can guess the dimensions of this problem when you find the sleepy old town of Heidelberg, the haunt of Goethe and the Student Prince, so jammed with American Army Trucks and generals' limousines that at 6 p.m. the traffic halted dead for 15 minutes at a time. It took me a full hour to drive seven blocks. Here is a massive physical friction and beneath it a much deeper friction in the minds of the conquerors and the conquered.

In a wine garden beside Goethe's river a former captain of artillery told me that the British army was brave and always "correct" (his highest adjective of praise) and that the Americans, though fearless, knew nothing of discipline. Unbuttoning his collar, putting his feet up on the table and hoisting a bottle to his lips, he gave an admiring crowd an imitation of an American soldier in the presence of a general: "Hi, general, how's

the boy?" In the German army, this former Nazi informed me, a soldier would not be shot for such an offense. He would be sent to a lunatic asylum as obviously insane.⁴

The contrasts are so striking, particularly the lack of discipline and the want of courtesy, that there is little wonder at the complaints that are made. "While we're rationed and pinched on small pay, they have their limousines, the best of food, the money for the call on women, and plenty of clothes to put on their backs," is a statement often heard in London and Paris. Such complaints indicate what the contrast means to the soldiers of France and Britain. How any American can expect gratitude to be shown in the circumstances is not easily explained.

But are there not complaints made by the Americans? Yes, there are plenty, and the controversies in the English papers reveal this fact, that most of the American visitors to London and Paris see both countries after two devastating wars steadily declining as first-class powers. The people of this generation do not know what Great Britain and the Continent were like before 1914. The life of Americans in England and France before the First World War was so different from what it is now that if one tried to make a clear picture of that difference it would seem to the people of today a glorified vision of peace and enjoyment.

"All good Americans go to Paris to die" was an expression one heard at the beginning of the century. And many were the tributes that were paid by Americans who resided in England. But the war changed all that and life has not been the same since.

There are so many reasons for the bitterness which is now noticeable to men like Bruce Hutchison that it would take a much longer essay than this to enumerate half of them.

After the First World War, some French writers claimed that Foch had wished to fight to a finish but had been overborne by British and American pressure. In 1921 Wickham Steed, who was editor of *The Times* when the fighting ended, asked Marshal Foch whether the notion were "true that he had been reluctant to conclude the armistice":

. . . He said it was not true, and he gave me his reasons. One of them was that he did not know how near the German army then was to total collapse. *Another reason was that he feared what he called an "American peace" if the war should go on throughout the winter. American forces were still reaching Europe in large numbers, and might have been numerically superior to those of France and Britain by the spring of 1919. Then, Foch imagined, the United States would insist on taking over the supreme*

⁴ *Loc. cit.*

command. General Pershing did want to fight on until Germany should capitulate unconditionally; but he bowed to the views of Marshal Foch. The British Commander, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, desired an armistice, and was willing to grant conditions that would facilitate the withdrawal of the German armies from Belgium and Northern France (*italics mine*).⁵

Surely this means that our services are cheerfully welcomed when it is necessary to save Great Britain and France from military defeat. We may throw our weight against a war-worn foe and help to bring off a military victory. But when the shouting is over and the medals distributed, our services are no longer required. Do we not see in this a reason for the resentment of those in high quarters in Paris and London? Today, because of the occupying armies, the very position that Foch wished to avoid is the one that now exists in Europe. Such is war and such are the differences of opinion among allies when it is over for the time being.

Points of Anglo-American Harmony

HAPPILY THERE IS ANOTHER SIDE to this matter. I wonder to what extent the mass of the people in Great Britain and the United States notice this friction. It seems to me that only a noisy minority pays any attention to it. Surely the outburst of sympathy when George VI died was an indication of the hearthside feeling of the American people for the English; and the enthusiasm which was expressed in this country at the time of the coronation of the Queen told in unmistakable terms that she had found a place in American hearts. Indeed, when you leave the political arena and cross the threshold of the millions of homes in this country, you find a warm-hearted people ready to show sorrow in bereavement and express joy on the coronation of a young mother.

And here we touch the kernel of the whole matter. The people are right-minded when there is no political interference. Cobden summarized the idea: as much contact as possible *between peoples* and as little as possible *between governments*. Our woes at present are political and economic. And it could not be otherwise after the First World War. Many of the countries of Europe were wrecked, and Great Britain found herself without a friend; with a crushing debt that could never be repaid; and an impoverished people. The British idea was that we Americans had made fortunes out of the war and that we had captured much of Great Britain's trade. Whereas our fortunes have increased according to their idea, a steady decline has set in in England which makes the future look black.

⁵ *Picture Post*, London, Jan. 23, 1943.

We saved Britain and her allies by entering the fray when Germany was ready to capitulate. We plumed ourselves on a great victory and crowed over the defeat of the greatest military power the world has ever known. Do you wonder that these things rankle and that there is antipathy to the American soldier in England and on the Continent? Why, the way our troops live in comparison with British, French, German, and Italians is enough to make those people despise them. I have seen it.

But these are obvious facts. The observant man of affairs who visits Europe is quite conscious of them. The real differences go much deeper. They are lodged in the nature of man himself. Where will you find a community in which people live in harmony? There is as much dislike among my neighbors as is to be found in the chancelleries. Mr. Jones doesn't like the way Mr. Smith dresses; Mr. Robertson doesn't like what Mr. Davis does on Sunday. And as for the wives and daughters of the residents, they criticize one another morning, noon and night. Does this not point to the fact that it is a pretty safe policy to mind one's own business and not meddle with other people's affairs? Did anybody ever challenge the right conclusion to which Socrates came when he laid down that wise course of conduct for men and communities?

Not until we, and our allies, are perfectly frank with ourselves and cease finding fault with one another shall we be able to get at the real truth of the matter. We must revise all our notions of the causes of the wars and the reasons for the rise of dictators in Europe. We have quite enough to occupy our minds here with domestic affairs.

As for the Second World War, it should be obvious to the people in Washington now that one of the tremendous blunders that was made at Potsdam was to keep American troops in Europe. None of our allies wanted them. Leading British soldiers and sailors whom I have met year after year since the close of the war say they will be glad when our boys go home. The phrase "Go home, Americans" is no joke; it is a heart-burning wish in the minds of millions in Europe.

During the last war, a story was told of a man from the State Department going to lunch at an English club. He asked a British colonel why the Americans were not liked. The reply was, "Well, if you wish to know, you are over-paid, you are over-dressed, and you are over here." That really does express much of the sentiment I know exists. Perhaps it would not be a bad idea if we got back to the original policy of a Monroe Doctrine and kept within its limits.

Port Washington, New York