The Propaganda of Civilization
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THE PROPAGANDA OF CIVILIZATION.*

If the mood in which the beginning of the century finds the chief nations of the northern temperate zone is to last, we are passing into one of those sharply marked off epochs in human history. In whatever directions we may think the intellect of the eighteenth century failed, its freedom from national assertiveness, its claim to international kinship, its enthusiasm for a humanity undivided and undivisible, have been practically unassailed. The national state of mind and the political policy necessary to give expression to this intellectual catholicity have been inculcated with an unquestioning devotion and allegiance generally reserved for matters of religious faith. The state of mind we have been taught to preserve is that of consideration for neighbors, upon the assumption that they, as well as we, are contributing to a fabric of law and order called civilization; and the political policy adopted has been one of modest and non-provocative guardianship of our national heritage as regards its foreign relationships, and of reforming and elevating effort in its domestic affairs. "It is required that we should aim at living in the community of nations," wrote Mr. Grant Duff in his introduction to his "Elgin Speeches," "as well-bred people live in society, gracefully acknowledging the rights of others, and confident, if we ever think about the matter at all, that others will soon come to do no less for us."

That state of mind and that political policy are being seriously assailed in Great Britain for the first time since the Whig ascendency. We have had our war passions often, and our dreams of a tinsel greatness, but these have only touched the surface of our national life. To-day, the Imperialist movement goes deeper. The shouts of the crowds in the streets, are not merely, as they were in the days of the French and the Russian wars, the bravos of a people that had to be kept quiet, they are the opinions of an electorate whose mental state has to be consulted by public representatives seeking to win votes.

*A lecture delivered to the West London Ethical Society.

Nor is the Imperialism of the day a mere outburst of angry nationalist pride roused by insult or aggression; it is a quickening of that sense of national righteousness which every people feels when it contains within itself either the awakening life of a great future or the invigorating discipline of a splendid past. The movement is all the more fraught with possibilities for good or ill that it is an expression of fundamental and permanent characteristics, that it is an expression of the sovereign will and not merely the holiday admiration of a disfranchised mob.

So far as the underlying spirit of Imperialism is a frank acceptance of national duty exercised beyond the nation's political frontiers, so far as it is a claim that a righteous nation is by its nature restless to embark upon crusades of righteousness wherever the world appeals for help, the spirit of Imperialism cannot be condemned. Morality is universal; the human sympathies and aspirations are so imperious that they embrace the world; the reforming ardor which compels us to embark upon the stormy and treacherous waters of world-statescraft, gushes from springs seated not merely in our nationalism but in our humanity. Hence it is, that when national existence is no longer threatened, national boundaries no longer disputed, and national life well knit together, the nations must invariably issue into a conflict regarding their place and influence in the world—regarding the scope and value of that righteousness which they think is theirs. A nation, like an individual, must live morally and not merely exist physically, and one of the first essentials of the moral life is a feeling of responsibility—a vindication of the use of that life to something else than its own self. The higher the type of life, the more imperious is this desire. Carlyle's shriek to produce in God's name, is heard and understood by nations as it is by persons. Christianity is the best example of this necessity of the active life to assimilate, to overflow, to outgrow, to conduct a propaganda. At its birth, it issued its royal proclamation. Its missionaries have been in every land and speaking in every tongue, in their crusade to "preach the gospel unto all peoples."

In this respect, indeed, I see no difference between Chris-

tianity as a faith and a national ideal as an inspiration. Both assume a special custodianship of what may be called "living truth"; both believe that they can contribute to the highest well-being of the world; both believe that they have discovered something which has been only partially discovered otherwise, or perhaps not otherwise discovered at all; both believe, as has been said of Christianity, "The gospel (the nation would say liberty or justice) having been designed for all nations, and its field being the world, it was from the first associated with means for its own extension."

The special form of this conception of national duty to the world in general, is that it is the duty of a nation to spread civilization. We are all more or less hypocrites in the sense that other people see the logic and the application of our principles in some respects better than ourselves, and we are therefore—even the most uselessly self-centred amongst us—open to the attack of somebody whose critical faculty has discovered some difference between our professions and our conduct to which we ourselves are blind. And so it is with nations. It is easy to dismiss with impatience Russia's efforts to reduce European armaments by a description of Russia's military system; it is easy to laugh at France's *Liberté, Fraternité Egalité* by a short enquiry into France's poltical and social history; it is easy to shatter the claims of morality made by Great Britain by a recital of some glaring events in British politics. That is an outside critical contribution, but it does not alter the fact that the Slav thinks that the Teuton has had his day, that he has sunk the spiritual things of life under a load of material excrescences; that the French believe that they preserve for the world those sentiments of good feeling and those manners of polish which are the most characteristic signs of progress from the stage of the brute; that the Briton, in an unimaginative but deadly serious way, considers that the torch of political enlightenment has been handed by some controlling cosmic power into his hands. Each defends its world policy on those grounds of moral economy.

Such are the "destinies" which the nations have placed before them. When the nations begin to be allured by what

they call their destiny, when they feel a conviction that something imperious whose designs are "inevitable" in history has selected them as a chosen people, it is no gross motive which inspires them to begin with. It is not my business, however, to take these ideals of destiny as a dim rushlight, and try with their aid to peer into the future. That would be interesting and, I think, somewhat profitable; but I have referred to them now only because I want to make it clear that however successful designing men may be in prostituting the high purposes of the nations to their own ends, or however imperfectly the nations themselves interpret their ideals in their political policies, the compulsion to expand and to assume world responsibility is worthy at its origin. It is nothing less than a recognition on the part of nations that they have a duty to the world, and that is as worthy as the idea that individuals have a duty to the communities in which they live.

The question to which I venture to give an answer is: How is this national duty to be performed? How can one nation promote the civilization of another? It is here that we discover the point of departure of two great parties in the country. That departure certainly does not take place on the question whether a nation has a duty to the world or not. The division appears when opinions how the duty is best fulfilled are expressed.

The answer to these questions must depend on how we regard civilization. If it is a veneer imposed by law or military force, a routine of life prescribed by authority, a garment of order which may be put on or taken off in accordance with a sovereign will, the question is obviously a very easy one to answer. A free distribution of administrators who have passed examinations in English law and native languages, and of soldiers who have been taught the arts and mysteries of Maxims, will civilize the world in a generation.

But civilization is not this thing apart, this garment, this surface characteristic. Guizot has likened it to the ocean, which receives all the streams of national life. It is not only the civilization of China or of India with their long centuries of political and moral evolution—their religions, their sys-

tems of law and order, woven inextricably into their national fabric,—that is joined by myriad fibres to the past, but the social order of the rudest tribe whose spiritual development has not gone beyond witchcrafts and devilries, is also an organic and disconnectable part of its existence. It is as true of the most barbaric as it is of the most civilized nations, that their code of social habit and their system of moral order are outgrowths from the historical and national circumstances of the people and have no life apart from those circumstances. The valuable "Report on Native Laws and Customs," by a Commission appointed by the Cape Colony Parliament in 1883, lays special stress on the fact that "many of the existing Kaffir laws and customs are so interwoven with the social conditions of the native population, that any premature or violent attempt to break them down or sweep them away, would be mischievous and dangerous in the highest degree, besides, as experience has shown, defeating the object in view."

Therefore, the distinction so often made between civilization and barbarism is mistaken in so far as it assumes that barbarism is a state of unmade or chaotic nature, a state unillumined by reason, a state of brutishness characterized by an absence of wise adaptation of institutions to a desirable end. The lowest form of institution is a growth from conditions and shows rational adaptations of man to circumstances and society to tribal history. The lowest barbarian has his civilization. He may be a child, but he is a child with a social inheritance. He is not a thing to bend at will. His resistance to civilization, as *we* understand it, is not simply that *he* does not understand it, but that he has a civilization of his own which he *does* understand.

Consequently, the first important fact which the propagandist of civilization has to keep in mind is, that each grade in social and political development has its own civilization, and that his influence must be directed not *de novo* but on lines already determined by tribal experience.

His next discovery is equally important. It is not only that there are different kinds of civilization, but that every civilization has some political, social or ethical excellence which in

that respect may place it superior to the propagandist's civilization itself.

The Western propagandist is still very much like the old dame who opened her school for the instruction of youth with no other equipment than a few large print copies of the alphabet, the Book of Proverbs, and a long strip of leather or a cane. The inhumanity of the Chinese, not being the inhumanity of the citizens of London, Paris, Berlin or New York, can always be recited to arouse crowds in those cities to a righteous horror of the "heathen Chinee"—just as the Western civilizations can be described in Pekin from the point of view of the cultured Chinaman, and be made the starting point of a Boxer movement. The shortcomings of an Egyptian Government under the Paschas appear to the English mind a good reason why English administrators should govern Egypt, but the shortcomings which the Egyptian, brought up in the civilization of the Nile Valley, feels regarding British rule, are put down to the incapacity of the Egyptian to understand the value of favors received. A nation which is at once the prosecuting attorney for another nation's faults and the judge of its own work, can hardly be expected to see that the faults may be upon both sides and that its claims to be the agent of civilization may amount to little more than that, in a game of see-saw, it has tilted the beam to the other side. The beam may not have been tilted so much beyond the just balance as it was formerly, but the balance is tilted; and a sudden tilt in a new direction, however near to the balance of justice the beam may rest, may be fatal to a national life which has been taught to adjust itself to less ideal conditions, whilst the faults of the new order may be painfully apparent to the people trained in blindness to the greater faults of the old.

The superior claims of Western civilization are founded mainly on two circumstances—the first is our abhorrence of violent human suffering; the second, the value we place upon settled government. Both are of comparatively recent growth, and the first is only imperfectly developed. We abhor the torture of human beings in which the sentiment of the Middle Ages revelled, but the half stifled moan of humanity

bending under a daily load, the quiet sufferings, the weeping in the closets, are still regarded as something which should not disturb our serenity. We have controlled our eyes, we have not opened our hearts. A massacre of Hindoos after the manner of the Armenian atrocities would be impossible in our Indian Empire, but an Indian famine touches the consciences of but a very few of us. Some peoples less civilized than we are, still indulge the eye, but are controlled more by the heart. The Armenian who said that he preferred an occasional Turkish massacre to a never ending Russian tyranny expressed this point.

Strange as it may seem at first, it is nevertheless true that the value we place on settled government is a great impediment in our way as civilizing agents. We have come to identify settled government with civilization itself, and that mobility of social ethics which is a characteristic of the peoples we have to deal with, is neither understood nor allowed for by us. I can now only deal with one illustration of this. From our settled government, we have acquired a sense of legal justice, which is a great virtue, but we have lost an understanding of the patriarchal system of common-sense equity. Our justice is in the main a mechanical justice. "The state in its capacity as the sustainer of rights has nothing to do with the amount of moral depravity in the criminal," says Green ("Principles of Political Obligation," p. 191). "The state," means *our* state—the state of the west—with the special relation between the person and the state to which we are accustomed. Green's philosophy of political obligation to a cultured Indian, for instance, would be miserable, immoral, Machiavellian. Not the least striking pages of that striking book, "The Soul of a People," are those which tell of our ideas of justice compared with those of the ordinary Burmese (chap. VIII., etc.). The story is told of an English officer in Rangoon, who caught his servant stealing money and had him sent to jail. When the boy was liberated, he came back smiling to his master expecting to be taken into his service again. But the English idea of punishment is not the Burmese idea, and the poor boy was turned away absolutely bewildered, fail-

ing to understand why, having "wiped out" his crime by punishment, he was not regarded as spotless. The officer's idea was that punishment was a form of revenge; the Burmese idea was that it was part of the great law of Buddha "the eternal inevitable sequence that leads us in the end to wisdom and peace," (p. 111).

A second difficulty arising from our experience of government is that of our social system. We have lost all sense of a tribal or national life on its industrial side and are now just beginning to strive to build it up again especially by municipal enterprise. Individual liberty has been abstracted from tribal and national liberty, with the result that we have come to see that warring thousands of individuals can neither secure nor protect liberty. In throwing our social system into the disorganization of individualism, we have killed the national goose that lays the golden egg of individual liberty. This error is fundamental. And yet in the case of many of the peoples whom we have taken over to civilize, we have found existing this very condition of true liberty which we ourselves are trying to recreate, and the first thing we have done is to destroy it. Nine-tenths of the troubles we have had in Africa have sprung from the fact that before being many days amongst a people, we have instructed the chiefs to regard tribal property as being personal to themselves. "The European authorities have always been prone to assume, not only that anyone holding the apparent position of sovereign over a district they wish to acquire, is its rightful head, but also that his supposed headship entitles him to dispose as he will of all the land and its products under his control."*

It is worse than futile to quarrel with the course of our progress in civilization. It has been determined by historical circumstance. But the most ignorantly absurd of all the justifications for the propaganda of civilization undertaken by Western peoples is that which assumes that the Basuto and the Chinese, the Hindoo and the Ashanti are doomed to go through an industrial revolution precisely the same as ours—

*"Blacks and Whites in South Africa," by H. R. Fox Bourne, p. 55.

like us, are doomed to see their tribal economy disrupted by an aggressive assertion of personal right—are doomed to have to substitute for practical purposes, the mechanical judgments of law for the moral considerations of equity.

If the line of thought I have been pursuing and the considerations I have been advancing are true, one or two important corollaries follow. Civilization cannot be transplanted. History shows this very clearly. The Englishman who proceeds to govern India, cannot pack his British civilization with his sun helmets and linen. At the end of a year's residence in Calcutta, he is not an Englishman at all. He is an Anglo-Indian in nature as well as in name. He does not, he can not, interpret to the people of India the political ideas of the people of Great Britain.

A second corollary is even more important. It is that the propaganda of civilization by political methods is a profound mistake and can lead to no good. The political method is this. When the civilizing nation is the stronger, on some pretext or other it makes itself responsible for the government of the weaker nation. It sends its administrators to manage the state, its civil servants to manage the finance, its lawyers to manage the courts of justice. It puts an end to abuses—as it sees them; it invests the state income in objects of public utility; it restores order and stability; it introduces its notions of political and economic government everywhere. The history of Imperial peoples is full of instances of this kind of government. Rome built roads and established courts of law; Athens offered protection; Holland and Spain opened markets. As Dr. Johnson said, "Cromwell's occupation of Scotland taught the Scots the use of cabbages." The most typical example of this work in modern times is the British occupation of Egypt. In Egypt, we have worked wonders. But even there, the failure of the political method is evident. We may build reservoirs, we may train an army, we may restore stability in government, we may establish honest systems of taxation and finance, we may banish petty tyranny and relieve the peasant from the fear of the pascha. That is excellent. But is it civilization? We know how much security of property

and stability of government mean to us. Do they mean the same thing for all peoples? A system of government that, on the admission of everybody, would vanish within twenty-four hours after our troops are withdrawn, is a very artificial contribution to the civilization of the world. Let me apply this thought to our own history. Supposing the coming of the Prince of Orange or of the Elector of Hanover had been marked by the clearing out from responsible government positions all men of English birth, supposing both the legislation and the administration of the country had been recast on Dutch or German models, supposing the law and order which came through those political changes had been, not so much sought by us as imposed upon us by benevolent propagandists of civilization, supposing that in order to save us from the tyranny of the Stuarts our benefactors had decided to ingraft Dutch and German speech and methods of thought upon our English stock, what would be the state of the country to-day? Would we have had poets? Would we have had philosophers? Would we have had statesmen? Would our people be now looking across the borders of a new century with youthful hope and vital vigor? Just as one people cannot borrow the civilization of another people, so is it impossible for a people to impose its peace and security on another. Be the foreign officials ever so upright and well-meaning, they are still foreign. A people may flourish under a tyranny which has been nurtured in its own history; a native bureaucracy or an aristocracy may be the means of elevating a nation; a Hohenzollern may be the guide of a Prussia of a Germany; but paternal government when the governors are one people and the governed another, can do nothing but level down and crush out. It can curb the energies of disquiet and revolution, it cannot lead them into more profitable channels. It can bring peace, but it is the peace of national death.

I have already indicated the reason why. The government of a people must be determined by the historical antecedents of that people. Separated from us by so slight differences as the nations of Europe are, I can prove my point from them. During the revolutionary periods of this century, England was re-

garded on the continent as the model of free government and its parliamentary system became the pattern for continental statesmen faced with the task of making a constitution. France, Germany, Italy, Austria, modelled their constitutions on the English pattern. Germany subsequently changed and found a place in its government for the tyrannical temperament of the Hohenzollerns. But, in so far as it has remained faithful to our model, and in the case of Austria, Italy and France, the result has been that observers of parliamentary government on the continent have come to doubt the wisdom of parliamentary government altogether. But if you examine thoroughly the problem of representative government as illustrated on the continent, you will discover that it is not one of representative government at all, but one of, How far one people can borrow from another its various forms of civilization—of which government is one of the chief. Over and over again, Mr. Whitman, in his "Imperial Germany," congratulates that country that it has not copied too devotedly English parliamentary methods as it was once inclined to do; and Mr. Bodley in his book on "France" turns repeatedly to point out how French political copying is largely responsible for French political inefficiency. "If nations were subject to the same just resentments as human beings," he says, "France might well dislike England for the very reason of having imported an institution modelled on one of hers, and of having found it a failure" (pp. 468-9).

Forms of government really express the differences of national experience. Religion, social condition, temperament, political exigencies, determine them for each people. They are but the mould of many inner spiritual forces, and, changed apart from the operation of these forces, they become unnatural and either lead to revolution, if the vitality of the governed is strong, or to an elimination of national characteristics, if the hand of the governors is too heavy to be thrown off. The Western estimate of the value of law and order *per se* is altogether exaggerated by the propagandist of Western civilization, because he innocently approaches all problems in civilization from his own standpoint.

When we start our search for the best means to fulfill our duty in the world, with the idea in mind that the peoples of low civilization are children, we may happily be led to consider educational methods. The first essential of a sound method in education is, not that you have to make the child, but that you have to assist it to grow. The educationalist does not begin to operate on a featureless nothing, but on something which offers him resistance if led in certain directions and encouragement if led in others. So with the propaganda of civilization. To abolish any native method, saving perhaps some of the most revolting customs like cannibalism—is a mistake. The care of the educator should be to rationalize all native methods on the lines of the development which those methods have followed already. The abolition of the village courts in India, of the chiefs' jurisdiction amongst the African tribes and so on, has been a profound mistake. To step in and do what the natives have been doing themselves is a profound mistake. The one hopeful chapter in all our imperial history is that of our relations wth Basutoland since it became a Crown Colony in 1884. We have allowed the chiefs to govern, our representatives being advisers; and we have kept out drink and the white men excepting a few missionaries and legitimate traders.

The ring fence method is the best. Outside that fence we must keep all those products of our civilization which if granted admission would destroy native life—the spirit seller, the land speculator, the gold prospector; whilst our function inside should be an influence rather than an authority, a light rather than a goad, reason rather than law. Liberty to the native does not mean that his borders are to be opened to all comers, but that he is to be policed by moral considerations and led into the ways of reason.

But the propaganda of civilization is not only a problem in native rule, the most advanced nations influence each other. The impact of nations makes for progress. That the Jew should meet the Greek, that the Teuton should meet the Celt, that the Saxon should meet the Latin has been good. They have exchanged wealth—intellectual and moral as well as material. Their meeting has opened up new epochs in human

thought. But in these modern days such impacts are only useful provided that the various nations so conduct their relations with each other that each one really cares for the opinions of the rest. The aim of an enlightened foreign policy is respect not hate. And how is international respect won?

I have said that the spiritual necessity underlying policies of expansion is "the call of duty in us all to regulate our race towards the unattainable." And nations instinctively respect their rivals whose success in that race is most marked. Unions for the sake of policy—Triple Alliances and Dual Alliances—have nothing in common with those mutual exchanges of experience which make for peace and progress. A nation wins respect just as it wins a command over the spiritual elements in its own destiny, as it builds its own political foundations and rears its own fabric of government upon plans of spiritual excellence. The wise statesman appeals to the youth of his country, not on considerations of Imperial responsibility, but of national excellence. The appeal to objective claims is the unethical, and consequently futile, substitute for an appeal to the love of youth for what is ideal within themselves. The name of Glasgow is world-wide and is respected, not because of its size nor because of its trade, but because of its success in creating a municipal life. What I may call "walking warily" in the ways of peace, or carefully studying your neighbors' sentiments so as to avoid giving offence, are but negative conditions to national respect. A nation is held in regard by the civilized world, not because it has been careful not to offend, but because it has been bold in forming a worthy deal of its own communal destiny and zealous in working it out. How weighty are the thoughts on this matter that come by pondering over such words as those written by Louis Blanc in his introduction to "1848." "It will ever be to the glory of England, that in the middle of the nineteenth century she should have been the only impregnable asylum in Europe for the exile driven from his country by absolutism or usurpation. How imposing the spectacle of a nation running the risk of war rather than condescend to the ignoble task of hunting down the homeless. She is the last sanctuary in Europe open to the human mind itself. It is no small honor to her that her

language should be at this moment the vernacular of Liberty; the only language in which freemen of every nation can interchange ideas, and print their thoughts with any chance of finding a public allowed to read them." A century of hate will not have the weight of a sunbeam in determining the greatness of English influence in the world, compared with the spirit of respect expressed in the eloquent opening sentences of Louis Blanc's history.

In the long run, we can do more for Africa by civilizing the East end of London than by putting an end for ever to the iniquities of the Khalifa in the Soudan. It is easy to fight battles, to vote millions, to sacrifice thousands of lives, to welcome the victors home. By such means we can see peace come to smile on the earth as we see the sun struggling through the frost hazes of winter. But the peace is as deceptive as the winter sunshine. In dealing with the products of the innermost nature of man, it would be well if we remembered that the life of a generation is but a span, that the life of a people is from the fathomless past to the fathomless future and that all the changes which count, grow slowly in the mysterious silence of things. Man seizes nature by violence and chains her to his will, and in his vanity proclaims that he has conquered, that he rules. Even as he proclaims his power its foundations quiver with the shock that is ultimately to undermine them. Nature rules. She is slow to wrath and long suffering. She allows man to indulge in vanity. But she rules; and so thorough in her work is she, that she grinds to dust the very tombstone which is the last record of the existence of him who proclaimed himself her king. So with the life of peoples. It is not to be changed by our proclamations, by force. Our conquests, our protectorates, our imposed civilizations are but oil we pour on deep and troubled waters. In the hidden depths below flow the currents and the tides that move the waters, and the surface calms make no difference. Down into those hidden depths we must go if the work we are doing in the name of civilization, is to add one atom to the permanent good of human effort.

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