THE PALMERSTON IDEAL IN DIPLOMACY.[1]

I.

THE American is always instituting a comparison between himself and his English cousin. The Englishman is ever contrasting his American kinsman with himself. Personal comparisons are proverbially ungracious. The accentuation of supposed contrasts is peculiarly so. Moreover, since men generally find what they seek faithfully, both comparison and contrast tend toward a factitious result. Thus it comes to pass that in most American newspaper offices there is a lay figure, clothed on with insularity, armed to the teeth in view of a possible opportunity for aggression, his face aglow with bitter and ill-concealed hatred of all things American. This is the «property» Briton, and his services are invaluable in those not infrequent seasons when the chariot-wheels of the editorial imagination drive heavily.

We are assured, upon the other hand, that well-ordered English households commonly harbor a corresponding American bogy. He is a fellow of infinite variety, who, when admitted to the drawing-room, slaps strangers on the back, consumes unlimited tobacco, and interlards his speech with barbaric slang. He serves the British matron as the wine-bibbing Helot served his Spartan master. He is even brought into requisition by the British author when that worthy adventures an American tale. He is of inestimable worth to Mr. Justin McCarthy, and it is to be feared that in moments of weakness even Mr. Andrew Lang has taken counsel of him.

[1] It is proper to say that this article was prepared before the appearance of President Cleveland's special message on the Venezuelan question.—EDITOR.

We are not at present concerned to inquire as to the measure of misrepresentation involved in such imaginary types. It will be found to correspond in some degree, however, to the contrast that appears to exist between them. For in sober fact, as respects character, the British and American publics are strikingly at one. The tone of popular sentiment is much the same. The attitude toward questions of general human interest is often identical. Political ideals are, at bottom, not so unlike as superficial observers fancy. Party spirit manifests itself in very similar fashion. Both are sensitive, though in slightly varying degrees, to the same appeals. The same national spirit animates both, showing itself in quite characteristic fashion when the jealousy of one is aroused against the other. Indeed, it is in their mutual rivalries and jealousies that their spiritual kinship is often most manifest. Their diversity is superficial and provincial; their unity fundamental and racial. The American who can divest himself of provincialism in England, and the Englishman who can lay aside his insularity in America, each finds himself at home.

It is beside my present purpose, however, to discuss the general ties of blood and character between the two peoples; I desire rather to point out the identity of their ideals of statesmanship. To do this we must recall the half-forgotten politics of day before yesterday.

It will generally be conceded that no English prime minister of this century has enjoyed a more enthusiastic popularity than Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston. In saying this I am not unmindful of the unique prestige of Mr. Gladstone. Mr. Gladstone's power, however, is built upon a foundation very different from that which bolstered up the fame of the greatest of Jingoes. There is a moral austerity in his character, a lofty

idealism in his eloquence, a certain philosophy of statesmanship to which, in spite of chance and change, he has been true, that compel a popular esteem and respect which seem scarcely diminished by the general recognition of his marvelous intellectual subtilty. It requires no prophet to foretell the lasting quality of Mr. Gladstone's fame.

Palmerston's hold upon the people, on the other hand, was due in no small measure to the absence of the very qualities by which Mr. Gladstone is characterized. His moral ideals, so far from being exalted, were common to the last degree. His talents commanded consideration by their quantity rather than their quality. He could lay little claim to eloquence, though his plain, ungraceful speech had the effectiveness of eloquence at times, and was always pitched upon a popular key. When his official life was in danger it rose upon one or two occasions—notably in the famous parliamentary conflict of 1850—very nearly to the height of greatness. But even the blunt, half-humorous, decided manner had a certain speciousness about it that was characteristic of the man. In his mouth a cant phrase—his famous «*Civis Romanus sum*» is a case in point—simulated life so well as to deceive the very elect. He managed to galvanize it into wearing its grave-clothes as jauntily as though they had been holiday attire.

Mr. Gladstone is credited with saying that the secret of eloquence consists in giving back to one's hearers in drops what one has received from them as spray. If this be Mr. Gladstone's analysis of his own power, we venture to suggest that he does himself injustice. But it serves admirably as a figurative expression of the essence of Lord Palmerston's popularity. He knew his public to perfection. Their national prejudices appealed to him as a man, and upon these prejudices he built his supremacy as a foreign minister. Of course there were not lacking those who saw through all this. Indeed, they represented a very considerable and highly respectable opposition. But Palmerston knew so well what the galleries liked, and played to them with such assiduity and success, that he could almost afford to ignore his critics.

To say this is in no sense to assert that he was without positive convictions, very unusual administrative abilities, or a smattering of disinterested sentiment. A man may possess all these and yet be a little of a demagogue and very much of a bully. Lord Palmerston admirably exemplifies the statement. The fact that he was successively a Tory, a disciple of Canning, a Peelite, and a Liberal is simply to say that he was a man of generous instincts who made an honest effort to keep pace with the inevitable progress of events. If it be laid to his charge that he aided and abetted Sir Robert Peel on that famous day when the latter «found the Whigs bathing and stole their clothes,» it may be pleaded in extenuation that the bathing Whigs had no vested right in the garments, while Peel and Palmerston had grown to their size and did hard work in them. Palmerston's worst enemy never questioned his administrative powers or his devotion to work. In his long terms at the War and Foreign offices, as well as during the years when he was Prime Minister, the amount of efficient labor which he bestowed upon the public service puts him in the front rank of working ministers; while his three years as Home Secretary served to illustrate both his industry and his versatility. Nor need there be any question that his sympathies, other things being equal, were always on the side of the oppressed, and that he rejoiced to strengthen the guaranties of freedom. But then, other things never were equal. Here lies the great indictment that is to be brought against Lord Palmerston as a foreign minister. He made what he called patriotism a fetish—a blind, despotic, tyrannous thing whose ignorant and imperious demands must be satisfied at once, regardless of all large rules of right and wrong. National aggrandizement, national self-assertion, without account of consequence or the higher demands of justice, were the ends which Palmerston sought to obtain, and national prejudice was the charm with which he conjured. Greville writes significantly on January 18, 1845: «I went there from Broadlands, where I left the Viscount [Palmerston] full of vigour and hilarity, and overflowing with diplomatic swagger. He said we might hold any language we please to France and America, and insist on what we thought necessary, without any apprehension that either of them would go to war, as both knew how vulnerable they were, France with her colonies and America with her slaves, a doctrine to which Lord Ashburton by no means subscribes.» («Journal of the Reign of Queen Victoria,» Vol. II, pp. 6, 7.) It is an admirable miniature of Palmerston at his best—and worst. It depicts a type of statesman that has given tone to England's foreign policy to England's lasting injury. I have said that Palmerston understood his public and played to it with assiduity and success. That public, however, was by no means England's best. The Ashburtons, the Granvilles,

the Clarendons were not of it.[1] The Queen and the Prince Consort emphasized their opposition to it. Reformers like Cobden and Bright did their best to divorce the masses from it. But insular prejudice was so strong, and melodrama proved so popular, that Palmerston retained his prestige almost without interruption until the end. Yet he succeeded in arousing an antagonism to British policy and in forming an ideal of British aggression abroad that still obtains upon the Continent and in America. The fact that there is no other nation with whose interests our own are so bound up is often quite lost sight of in view of popular prejudice against a policy that men like to think still formed upon the Palmerston model. The indisputable fact of the superiority of English rule to that exercised by France or Germany over subject nations is but grudgingly admitted, because since Palmerston's day men have been able to see nothing in every new British acquisition but the brutal bullying of a weaker power. No higher-handed piece of national aggression has probably been perpetrated within this century than the recent invasion of Madagascar by the French. But the world at large has proved quite acquiescent. Had England undertaken such an expedition, however, the press of two continents would have exhausted the vocabulary of contumely. Yet no one at all conversant with colonial history can doubt that Madagascar would be a far better place to live and work in under English than under French dominion, and that it would prove of vastly greater value to the civilized world. England's position to-day is startlingly isolated; and a prime factor in her isolation has been that she has cherished Lord Palmerston's ideal of statesmanship too dearly.

II.

It is not long since we were assured on most excellent authority that high ideals—the ideals of the ten commandments and the golden rule—had no place in practical politics. Whether this be true or not, it is a philosophical platitude that political ideals of some sort exist, influencing the opinions and consequent activities of the mass of citizens; but they are generally vague. The average man is impatient of definition; he has little concern with the exact content of words. They easily become battle-cries, watchwords, or tokens appealing directly to that surface stratum of prejudice in him which often clothes, and sometimes smothers, the intellectual and ethical man within. So long as this remains the case it is evident that the ideal of the citizen will be to a considerable extent compact of prejudice rather than of intellectual or ethical aspiration; that is to say, cant phrases, rallying-cries, *et id omne genus*, will have more weight with him than appeals to sober judgment or to moral sense. There has long been a notion that the sphere of superstition was that in which cant found freest play. But if it were ever true, superstition must long since have surrendered its proud distinction to politics.

It is doubtful if any considerable body of men exist who have a sincerer love of fair play, a more honest desire to see impartial justice done, or a truer respect for self-restrained and unselfish action, than the mass of American and British citizens, when they lay aside personal prejudice and calmly consider the right and wrong of a course of public or private policy; but it is not at all doubtful that to induce them to do this would be regarded as bad politics and worse journalism by the great authorities in the political and journalistic world. One of the commonplaces of their economy, indeed, is that power consists, not so much in the clear vision and firm grasp of truth, nor in a plain and unadorned appeal to the best judgment of their fellow-citizens, as in a «pull» upon their prejudice, and in an ability to arouse them to blind and unquestioning «enthusiasm.» Hence the free coinage of watchwords in every campaign, which, as a New England clergyman once suggested to the writer, is likely to prove as dangerous to the commonweal as the free coinage of silver. Doubtless it has been so since politics began. The demagogue and the poor are ever with us. I have cited the case of Lord Palmerston, however, because it is so marked, and because its influence has proved so lasting. The Jingoism of the Marquis of Salisbury, for instance, is undoubtedly a culture from the original Palmerston microbe, although the virus may have become somewhat attenuated in the process.

On our own side of the water, in the mean time, we have become aware of the growth of a Palmerstonian ideal of foreign policy which bears all the marks of legitimate descent. Its devotees are marvelously noisy. They depend largely upon watchwords and badges. They are chary of definition, and

[1] Though both Granville and Clarendon served with Palmerston, neither seems to have been in genuine accord with the *tone* of his foreign policy. I think this statement borne out by the extraordinary events that marked the formation of the ministry of 1859, especially the Queen's part therein.

charier still of all appeal to the sober second thought of men. Indeed, the man of sober second thought is the one man they cannot away with. The self-restraint and dignity which the world has a right to expect of a great nation are scandalous in their eyes. True, they have much to say of «dignity,» but they persistently use the word in its Palmerstonian sense of overbearing truculence. They talk much and loudly of «Americanism»; but when their speech is reduced to its lowest terms we discover that they have emptied the word of all moral content. It has become a mere «Abracadabra»—a charm wherewith to call spirits from the vasty deep of popular prejudice, and send them upon the errands of small politics. Had Washington a prophetic vision of a United States senator declaring war upon Great Britain in a time of profound peace, when he wrote: «Observe good faith and justice toward all nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all. Religion and morality enjoin this conduct, and can it be that good policy does not equally enjoin it? It will be worthy of a free, enlightened, and at no distant period a great nation to give to mankind the magnanimous and too novel example of a people always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence?» Was it a desire to observe good faith and justice toward all nations that induced another United States senator to advocate the practical repudiation of obligations laid upon the Government by a properly constituted commission of arbitration? Is it the guidance of an exalted justice and benevolence that leads the chauvinist press to cry aloud for the building of war vessels upon the great lakes, in distinct contravention of treaty provisions? There is something half pathetic in the simple dignity with which Washington concludes the counsels of his farewell message: «If I may even flatter myself that they may be productive of some partial benefit, some occasional good; that they may now and then recur to moderate the fury of party spirit, to warn against the mischiefs of foreign intrigues, to guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism, this hope will be a full recompense for the solicitude for your welfare by which they have been dictated.»

Measured by the standard of certain senators, Washington and Lincoln can scarce pass muster to-day as «good Americans.» It is difficult to imagine the former attempting to confer added dignity upon the flag of a nation's love by rechristening it «Old Glory»; or the latter shrieking in corybantic fury for the summary obliteration of Spain before she has time to explain or apologize for an apparent insult to an American ship. Indeed, as the greatness of these statesmen looms large through the years, we begin to see in what considerable measure it was due to their patient conservatism in respect of our foreign relations, to their absolute repudiation of what I have called the Palmerston ideal. Yet surely no presidents have done more than they to give dignity to the flag and win for the nation a world's respect. This Palmerston ideal is no new thing in our national counsels. But for President Lincoln's wisdom and firmness it would have had a large place in the nation's thought in 1861; for on April 1 of that year Secretary Seward presented to the President an outline of foreign policy that was substantially as follows:

«I would demand explanations from Spain and France categorically at once. I would seek explanations from Great Britain and Russia, and send agents into Canada, Mexico, and Central America, to rouse a vigorous spirit of independence on this continent against European intervention; and, if satisfactory explanations are not received from Spain and France, would convene Congress and declare war against them. For this purpose it must be somebody's business to pursue and direct it incessantly. Either the President must do it himself, and be all the while active in it, or devolve it on some member of his cabinet. Once adopted, debates on it must end, and all agree and abide. It is not in my especial province; but I neither seek to evade nor assume responsibility.» (Morse, «Abraham Lincoln,» I, pp. 277, 278.)

It is scarcely too much to say that the adoption of such an inconceivably fatuous policy must eventually have wrecked the Union. The quiet firmness with which the President set it aside is become matter of history, and no one to-day would dare question his wisdom.

We would yield to none in our desire that American dignity be asserted abroad. That, however, can never come to pass until we regard our place among the nations of the earth as too great to be made the stalking-horse of every petty political scheme and schemer. Nor is it consonant with that dignity to treat the murder of Italians in New Orleans or of Chinese in Idaho with comparative levity, while we shout for truculent action the moment that any question arises wherein we have perchance been wronged by Spain, France, or England. The bane of France ever since the Revolution has been

the irresponsible manner in which her people have treated questions of great and far-reaching public import. The irony of the Paris bookseller who, when asked for a copy of the French constitution, replied that he did not keep periodical literature, was sad as well as mordant. It was this same irresponsibility in lofty station that made Palmerston an object of hatred in every court in Europe, and that has ministered directly to England's isolation. It is such irresponsibility among men of influence that is rendering wise and conservative settlement of our own foreign questions increasingly difficult, and an assertion of true American dignity well-nigh impossible.

Edward M. Chapman.

THREE LETTERS FROM JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

IN the spring of 1890 a discussion arose between a friend and myself in regard to the following sentence in Lowell's «My Garden Acquaintance»: «The robins are not good solo singers; but their chorus, as, like primitive fire-worshipers, they hail the return of light and warmth to the earth, is unrivaled.»

The argument was rather one-sided. My friend spoke with the conviction born of his long and close observation of the robin. I could only urge my confidence in the correctness of Mr. Lowell's statement.

At length, feeling my inability to defend my favorite author, I resolved to write and ask Mr. Lowell himself to explain the passage. By return mail I received a letter in Mr. Lowell's own hand, which read as follows:

«ELMWOOD, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.,
May 2, 1890.

«DEAR MISS CLARKE: I used to be thought a fairly good observer; indeed, Darwin once paid me the doubtful compliment of saying to me, ‹You ought to have been a naturalist.› I have lived in the same house (except when in Europe) for seventy-one years, and robins find good building-sites in my trees. I once counted seventy on my lawn at the same time. As the males sing without any reference to each other of a morning, and as there are many, I spoke of it, loosely, perhaps, as a chorus. Considered as a thrush, the robin is surely inferior to most of his kind; I am tempted to say all of them. Now and then there is a better singer among them. I have heard one this year who entertained me with some very agreeable variations on their habitual *ding-dong*.

«As for their singing during the day, I am surprised that your friend has never heard their ‹rain-song,› which times itself by the fore-feeling of a shower in the air. Nay, I heard the performer of which I have just spoken at about half-past four in the afternoon. If yours don't begin matins until five o'clock they are lazy creatures. Ours salute the day. But perhaps they don't build with you? That would make a difference in the singing; for though, as I think, rather *bourgeois*, it is love that makes them sing, as it made *Polonius*, no doubt, when he ‹suffered great extremity for love.›

«All the same, though I can't quite give in to your friend, I like her[1] all the better for taking sides with a bird against a man. The worst of them are better than we deserve.

«Faithfully yours,
«J. R. LOWELL.»

I received this letter just as I was starting on a visit to the home of the Hon. Charles Anderson, a brother of Colonel Robert Anderson, and ex-Governor of Ohio. I resolved to delay answering the letter—for of course I must write and thank Mr. Lowell—until I had shown it to Governor Anderson. As I anticipated, Governor Anderson was much interested in the letter. He told me that years before, when he was a lawyer in Cincinnati, he had entertained Mr. Lowell during

[1] He evidently thought the friend a woman.