JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN

Views on British Expansion in the Colonial Secretary's Speeches Strikingly Pertinent to the Present Time


If these speeches of the late Joseph Chamberlain—the apostle of Imperial Federation and the man who, as Secretary of State for the Colonies, made that post one of the most important in the British government—had been published a year ago, it is most improbable that anyone would have noted in some of them a similarity in mode of thought between the distinguished Englishman and Treitschke, Bernhardi, and other exponents of German doctrines which have become subjects of world-wide discussion in the last five months.

As these doctrines are today, however, in men's minds, it is interesting to note that Mr. Chamberlain, in at least two important speeches on colonial expansion—the parliamentary term for sellore through force of territorial belonging to some one else—showed a kinship in mental processes on foreign politics and imperialism.

Mankind has read many times since Aug. I that the doctrine that it is quite proper—obligatory, indeed, if manifest destiny is not to be absurdly touted—for cultivated Germany to impose her civilization upon less civilized, less virile nations, through the use of highway and bayonet; that bloodshed for such a purpose is nobly shed; that the human race as a whole will benefit vastly from a victorious Germany; that the world is for the strong, and that it is the plain duty of a strong nation which finds its boundaries too cramped to extend that empire over weaker nations, because the benefit of the strong is, as the scheme of civilization emphatically shows, the one moral good to be aimed at. These doctrines the Germans seek to apply to other white men. Mr. Chamberlain, in behalf of the British, applied doctrines strikingly similar to self-men. He too, held that it was of the highest morality to have a Tommy Atkins carry culture by machine gun to less civilized and weaker peoples, even that bloodshed was shed for a lofty purpose; that the extension of the British domain was a good thing for the world, and to be pursued until the greatest appearance of self-preservation could be as non-existent in Mr. Chamberlain's mind as in that of Gen. von Bernhardi.

Mr. Chamberlain's speeches are particularly interesting in this connection, since, to the editor which has given the title "Pegging Out Claims for Postorty," was delivered in the House of Commons on March 29, 1893. The other, the "True Conception of Empire," was an address at the annual Royal Colonial Institute meeting, on March 21, 1907.

The term "Pegging Out Claims for Postorty," seems, to judge from a remark of Mr. Chamberlain, to have been coined by Lord Justice Esher. The speech was made in defense of criticism directed against the Government for their proposal to send an expedition to Uganda, into which the British had entered in 1894. Mr. Chamberlain began by replying to a Radical member, who was objecting to the expense of the expedition, and who thought money should not be spent on over sea expeditions while there were hungry beings in the slums of London. In part, Mr. Chamberlain says:

"Does my honorable friend believe, if it were not for the gigantic foreign trade that has been developed in recent years, and the immense wealth that we could sublate in this country in any kind of development, how necessary it is to our credit and support in these small islands 400,000,000 of people, in which the rate of natural increase is 3.5 per cent, and the average age of our population 18—lives, not to mention the life of a trade which seems to have brought about the action of the missionaries, who in centuries past did not think from maiming sacrifices of blood and treasure, and who were not ashamed, but to peg out claims for postorty? I wish to give up all share in what has been called the policy of Africa. I believe the people of this country have determined that they will take a great share in the events of new lands, and in the work of civilization they have to do there. (O) [increase] that the adventure and enterprise which has rendered us, of all nations, preeminent in the work of colonization. (O) [increase]

If we are not going to give up this mission for us, how can we justify the sacrifice of life and money? I hold that, whether we are in Africa, or India, or in the Pacific, we may sacrifice both, if we see before us a prospect of the result. But when we sacrifice the result, we may have to make. This country has by large masses of people and railways, and if we are to make our duty to take our share in the work of civilization, we must take a share in the history of the empires. (O) [increase]

We are not at all troubled by accusations of jingoism.

[He laughs] We went forward in Uganda: they broke up such Government. Their net result is to make us secure for Uganda the past Britannica which has been so beneficial to the British and maintain that the prospects of Uganda are quite equal to the prospects of China fifty years ago. This is what Lord Rosebery means by pegging out claims for postorty. We are all great gunners and rub- ber, and perhaps even wheat, and in return we shudder at the thought of the possible destruction of our factories. (O) [increase] We are all jingoists, and the long run be both in accordance with our interests.

In the second speech, Mr. Chamberlain spoke of the general policy of England in extending her territory. He dwelt on the "mission" of England to take land from weaker peoples and give them her own; a mission which, he declares, is the same as the Treitschke school dwells on the "destiny" of Germany to extend her territory by the exercise of those forces formalized on the battlefield. Mr. Chamberlain said in part:

In carrying out this work of civilization we are fulfilling, what I believe to be our national mission; and we are hoping for the exercise of those forces and faculties and qualities which constitute the essence of the British nation. (O) [increase] No doubt, in the first instance, when the work of civilization is being undertaken for the first time, there is a lack of life among the mass of people, and in a high public spirit. But there are people among these who have been sent out to bring these countries into some kind of discipline, and this is the condition of the mission we have to fulfill. (O) [increase] We are a people of a very small minority of men—those who deport another to a country and displace them as large as Europe from the barbarism and the superstitious customs in which they have been and for centuries. I remember a picture by Mr. Solou's of a philanthropist becoming the instrument by which British civilization was new noted. The philanthropist complained of the use of the term 'British mission' to induce banditage of warfare. You cannot have one without breaking eggs: you cannot destroy the practices of the people, or they would not exist. The British army, which for centuries has desolated the interior of Africa, has at least, I believe, fairly contrast the gain to humanity with the price which we are bound to pay for it. I think you have seen a considerable number of expeditions as those which have been recently conducted with the prospect of the purposes in Africa, N. Zululand, Ashanti, Bein, and Nape—expeditions which have been and indeed have cost valuable lives, but as to which we may rest assured that for every 100 of the people in the world the cause of civilization and the prosperity of the people will be enhanced and advanced.

I am convinced that we shall have to pay a dear price for our action, and which our history and our national character have imposed upon us.

It seems to me that the tendency of the time is to throw all power into the hands of a king, or a king-like monarch, and to a great extent those which are non-progressive—seem to be driven to fall into a secondary and subordinate place.

The collection of speeches begins with one delivered at Birmingham on March 7, 1907. Mr. Chamberlain was a member of the Town Council, and ends with his speech of July 9, 1900, also at Birmingham, on the occasion of his retirement. The speeches are divided into two volumes, dealing with the various topics of the day—radicalism and reform; speeches on Ireland; the Unionist Alliance speeches, mainly foreign; a speech on the Entente Cordiale with Africa; imperial union and tariff reform. To his father, as to Chatham, says Austen Chamberlain in the introduction, "speech was a form of action."