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The Expansion of Europe The Culmination of Modern History

Ramsay Muir

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THE EXPANSION OF EUROPE
THE CULMINATION OF MODERN HISTORY

BY
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UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

SECOND EDITION

TO MY MOTHER

PREFACE

The purpose of this book is twofold.

We realise to-day, as never before, that the fortunes of the world, and of every individual in it, are deeply affected by the problems of world-politics and by the imperial expansion and the imperial rivalries of the greater states of Western civilisation. But when men who have given no special attention to the history of these questions try to form a sound judgment on them, they find themselves handicapped by the lack of any brief and clear resume of the subject. I have tried, in this book, to provide such a summary, in the form of a broad survey, unencumbered with detail, but becoming fuller as it comes nearer to our own time. That is my first purpose. In fulfilling it I have had to cover much well-trodden ground. But I hope I have avoided the aridity of a mere compendium of facts.

My second purpose is rather more ambitious. In the course of my narrative I have tried to deal with ideas rather than with mere facts. I have tried to bring out the political ideas which are implicit in, or which result from, the conquest of the world by Western civilisation; and to show how the ideas of the West have affected the outer world, how far they have been modified to meet its needs, and how they have developed in the process. In particular I have endeavoured to direct attention to the significant new political form which we have seen coming into existence, and of which the British Empire is the oldest and the most highly developed example—the world-state, embracing peoples of many different types, with a Western nation-state as its nucleus. The study of this new form seems to me to be a neglected branch of political science, and one of vital importance. Whether or not it is to be a lasting form, time alone will show. Finally I have tried to display, in this long imperialist conflict, the strife of two rival conceptions of empire: the old, sterile, and ugly conception which thinks of empire as mere domination, ruthlessly pursued for the sole advantage of the master, and which seems to me to be most fully exemplified by Germany; and the nobler conception which regards empire as a trusteeship, and which is to be seen gradually emerging and struggling towards victory over the more brutal view, more clearly and in more varied forms in the story of the British Empire than in perhaps any other

part of human history. That is why I have given a perhaps disproportionate attention to the British Empire. The war is determining, among other great issues, which of these conceptions is to dominate the future.

In its first form this book was completed in the autumn of 1916; and it contained, as I am bound to confess, some rather acidulated sentences in the passages which deal with the attitude of America towards European problems. These sentences were due to the deep disappointment which most Englishmen and most Frenchmen felt with the attitude of aloofness which America seemed to have adopted towards the greatest struggle for freedom and justice ever waged in history. It was an indescribable satisfaction to be forced by events to recognise that I was wrong, and that these passages of my book ought not to have been written as I wrote them. There is a sort of solemn joy in feeling that America, France, and Britain, the three nations which have contributed more than all the rest of the world put together to the establishment of liberty and justice on the earth, are now comrades in arms, fighting a supreme battle for these great causes. May this comradeship never be broken. May it bring about such a decision of the present conflict as will open a new era in the history of the world—a world now unified, as never before, by the final victory of Western civilisation which it is the purpose of this book to describe.

Besides rewriting and expanding the passages on America, I have seized the opportunity of this new issue to alter and enlarge certain other sections of the book, notably the chapter on the vital period 1878-1900, which was too slightly dealt with in the original edition. In this work, which has considerably increased the size of the book, I have been much assisted by the criticisms and suggestions of some of my reviewers, whom I wish to thank.

Perhaps I ought to add that though this book is complete in itself, it is also a sort of sequel to a little book entitled *Nationalism and Internationalism*, and was originally designed to be printed along with it: that is the explanation of sundry footnote references. The two volumes are to be followed by a third, on *National Self-government*, and it is my hope that the complete series may form a

useful general survey of the development of the main political factors in modern history.

In its first form the book had the advantage of being read by my friend Major W. L. Grant, Professor of Colonial History at Queen's University Kingston, Ontario. The pressure of the military duties in which he is engaged has made it impossible for me to ask his aid in the revision of the book.

R. M. July 1917

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I

THE MEANING AND THE MOTIVES OF IMPERIALISM

One of the most remarkable features of the modern age has been the extension of the influence of European civilisation over the whole world. This process has formed a very important element in the history of the last four centuries, and it has been strangely undervalued by most historians, whose attention has been too exclusively centred upon the domestic politics, diplomacies, and wars of Europe. It has been brought about by the creation of a succession of 'Empires' by the European nations, some of which have broken up, while others survive, but all of which have contributed their share to the general result; and for that reason the term 'Imperialism' is commonly employed to describe the spirit which has led to this astonishing and world-embracing movement of the modern age.

The terms 'Empire' and 'Imperialism' are in some respects unfortunate, because of the suggestion of purely military dominion which they convey; and their habitual employment has led to some unhappy results. It has led men of one school of thought to condemn and repudiate the whole movement, as an immoral product of brute force, regardless of the rights of conquered peoples. They have refused to study it, and have made no endeavour to understand it; not realising that the movement they were condemning was as inevitable and as irresistible as the movement of the tides—and as capable of being turned to beneficent ends. On the other hand, the implications of these terms have perhaps helped to foster in men of another type of mind an unhealthy spirit of pride in mere domination, as if that were an end in itself, and have led them to exult in the extension of national power, without closely enough considering the purposes for which it was to be used. Both attitudes are deplorable, and in so far as the words 'Empire,' 'Imperial,' and 'Imperialism' tend to encourage them, they are unfortunate words. They certainly do not adequately express the full significance of the process whereby the civilisation of Europe has been made into the civilisation of the world.

Nevertheless the words have to be used, because there are no others which at all cover the facts. And, after all, they are in some ways entirely appropriate. A great part of the world's area is inhabited by peoples who are still in a condition of barbarism, and seem to have rested in that condition for untold centuries. For such peoples the only chance of improvement was that they should pass under the dominion of more highly developed peoples; and to them a European 'Empire' brought, for the first time, not merely law and justice, but even the rudiments of the only kind of liberty which is worth having, the liberty which rests upon law. Another vast section of the world's population consists of peoples who have in some respects reached a high stage of civilisation, but who have failed to achieve for themselves a mode of organisation which could give them secure order and equal laws. For such peoples also the 'Empire' of Western civilisation, even when it is imposed and maintained by force, may bring advantages which will far outweigh its defects. In these cases the word 'Empire' can be used without violence to its original significance, and yet without apology; and these cases cover by far the greater part of the world.

The words 'Empire' and 'Imperialism' come to us from ancient Rome; and the analogy between the conquering and organising work of Rome and the empire-building work of the modern nation-states is a suggestive and stimulating analogy. The imperialism of Rome extended the modes of a single civilisation, and the Reign of Law which was its essence, over all the Mediterranean lands. The imperialism of the nations to which the torch of Rome has been handed on, has made the Reign of Law, and the modes of a single civilisation, the common possession of the whole world. Rome made the common life of Europe possible. The imperial expansion of the European nations has alone made possible the vision—nay, the certainty—of a future world-order. For these reasons we may rightly and without hesitation continue to employ these terms, provided that we remember always that the justification of any dominion imposed by a more advanced upon a backward or disorganised people is to be found, not in the extension of mere brute power, but in the enlargement and diffusion, under the shelter of power, of those vital elements in the life of Western civilisation which have been the secrets of its strength, and the greatest of its gifts to the

world: the sovereignty of a just and rational system of law, liberty of person, of thought, and of speech, and, finally, where the conditions are favourable, the practice of self-government and the growth of that sentiment of common interest which we call the national spirit. These are the features of Western civilisation which have justified its conquest of the world[1]; and it must be for its success or failure in attaining these ends that we shall commend or condemn the imperial work of each of the nations which have shared in this vast achievement.

[1] See the first essay in *Nationalism and Internationalism*, in which an attempt is made to work out this idea.

Four main motives can be perceived at work in all the imperial activities of the European peoples during the last four centuries. The first, and perhaps the most potent, has been the spirit of national pride, seeking to express itself in the establishment of its dominion over less highly organised peoples. In the exultation which follows the achievement of national unity each of the nation-states in turn, if the circumstances were at all favourable, has been tempted to impose its power upon its neighbours,[2] or even to seek the mastery of the world. From these attempts have sprung the greatest of the European wars. From them also have arisen all the colonial empires of the European states. It is no mere coincidence that all the great colonising powers have been unified nation-states, and that their imperial activities have been most vigorous when the national sentiment was at its strongest among them. Spain, Portugal, England, France, Holland, Russia: these are the great imperial powers, and they are also the great nation-states. Denmark and Sweden have played a more modest part, in extra-European as in European affairs. Germany and Italy only began to conceive imperial ambitions after their tardy unification in the nineteenth century. Austria, which has never been a nation-state, never became a colonising power. Nationalism, then, with its eagerness for dominion, may be regarded as the chief source of imperialism; and if its effects are unhappy when it tries to express itself at the expense of peoples in whom the potentiality of nationhood exists, they are not necessarily

unhappy in other cases. When it takes the form of the settlement of unpeopled lands, or the organisation and development of primitive barbaric peoples, or the reinvigoration and strengthening of old and decadent societies, it may prove itself a beneficent force. But it is beneficent only in so far as it leads to an enlargement of law and liberty.

[2] Nationalism and Imperialism, pp. 60, 64, 104.

The second of the blended motives of imperial expansion has been the desire for commercial profits; and this motive has played so prominent a part, especially in our own time, that we are apt to exaggerate its force, and to think of it as the sole motive. No doubt it has always been present in some degree in all imperial adventures. But until the nineteenth century it probably formed the predominant motive only in regard to the acquisition of tropical lands. So long as Europe continued to be able to produce as much as she needed of the food and the raw materials for industry that her soil and climate were capable of yielding, the commercial motive for acquiring territories in the temperate zone, which could produce only commodities of the same type, was comparatively weak; and the European settlements in these areas, which we have come to regard as the most important products of the imperialist movement, must in their origin and early settlement be mainly attributed to other than commercial motives. But Europe has always depended for most of her luxuries upon the tropics: gold and ivory and gems, spices and sugar and fine woven stuffs, from a very early age found their way into Europe from India and the East, coming by slow and devious caravan routes to the shores of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Until the end of the fifteenth century the European trader had no direct contact with the sources of these precious commodities; the supply of them was scanty and the price high. The desire to gain a more direct access to the sources of this traffic, and to obtain control of the supply, formed the principal motive for the great explorations. But these, in their turn, disclosed fresh tropical areas worth exploiting, and introduced new luxuries, such as tobacco and tea, which soon took rank as necessities. They also brought a colos-

sal increment of wealth to the countries which had undertaken them. Hence the acquisition of a share in, or a monopoly of, these lucrative lines of trade became a primary object of ambition to all the great states. In the nineteenth century Europe began to be unable to supply her own needs in regard to the products of the temperate zone, and therefore to desire control over other areas of this type; but until then it was mainly in regard to the tropical or subtropical areas that the commercial motive formed the predominant element in the imperial rivalries of the nation-states. And even to-day it is over these areas that their conflicts are most acute.

A third motive for imperial expansion, which must not be overlooked, is the zeal for propaganda: the eagerness of virile peoples to propagate the religious and political ideas which they have adopted. But this is only another way of saying that nations are impelled upon the imperial career by the desire to extend the influence of their conception of civilisation, their Kultur. In one form or another this motive has always been present. At first it took the form of religious zeal. The spirit of the Crusaders was inherited by the Portuguese and the Spaniards, whose whole history had been one long crusade against the Moors. When the Portuguese started upon the exploration of the African coast, they could scarcely have sustained to the end that long and arduous task if they had been allured by no other prospect than the distant hope of finding a new route to the East. They were buoyed up also by the desire to strike a blow for Christianity. They expected to find the mythical Christian empire of Prester John, and to join hands with him in overthrowing the infidel. When Columbus persuaded Queen Isabella of Castile to supply the means for his madcap adventure, it was by a double inducement that he won her assent: she was to gain access to the wealth of the Indies, but she was also to be the means of converting the heathen to a knowledge of Christianity; and this double motive continually recurs in the early history of the Spanish Empire. France could scarcely, perhaps, have persisted in maintaining her far from profitable settlements on the barren shores of the St. Lawrence if the missionary motive had not existed alongside of the motives of national pride and the desire for profits: her great work of exploration in the region of the Great Lakes and the Mississippi Valley was due quite as much to the zeal of the heroic missionaries of the Jesuit and other

orders as to the enterprise of trappers and traders. In English colonisation, indeed, the missionary motive was never, until the nineteenth century, so strongly marked. But its place was taken by a parallel political motive. The belief that they were diffusing the free institutions in which they took so much pride certainly formed an element in the colonial activities of the English. It is both foolish and unscientific to disregard this element of propaganda in the imperialist movement, still more to treat the assertion of it by the colonising powers as mere hypocrisy. The motives of imperial expansion, as of other human activities, are mixed, and the loftier elements in them are not often predominant. But the loftier elements are always present. It is hypocrisy to pretend that they are alone or even chiefly operative. But it is cynicism wholly to deny their influence. And of the two sins cynicism is the worse, because by over-emphasising it strengthens and cultivates the lower among the mixed motives by which men are ruled.

The fourth of the governing motives of imperial expansion is the need of finding new homes for the surplus population of the colonising people. This was not in any country a very powerful motive until the nineteenth century, for over-population did not exist in any serious degree in any of the European states until that age. Many of the political writers in seventeenth-century England, indeed, regarded the whole movement of colonisation with alarm, because it seemed to be drawing off men who could not be spared. But if the population was nowhere excessive, there were in all countries certain classes for which emigration to new lands offered a desired opportunity. There were the men bitten with the spirit of adventure, to whom the work of the pioneer presented an irresistible attraction. Such men are always numerous in virile communities, and when in any society their numbers begin to diminish, its decay is at hand. The imperial activities of the modern age have more than anything else kept the breed alive in all European countries, and above all in Britain. To this type belonged the conquistadores of Spain, the Elizabethan seamen, the French explorers of North America, the daring Dutch navigators. Again, there were the younger sons of good family for whom the homeland presented small opportunities, but who found in colonial settlements the chance of creating estates like those of their fathers at home, and

carried out with them bands of followers drawn from among the sons of their fathers' tenantry. To this class belonged most of the planter-settlers of Virginia, the seigneurs of French Canada, the lords of the great Portuguese feudal holdings in Brazil, and the dominant class in all the Spanish colonies. Again, there were the 'undesirables' of whom the home government wanted to be rid—convicts, paupers, political prisoners; they were drafted out in great numbers to the new lands, often as indentured servants, to endure servitude for a period of years and then to be merged in the colonial population. When the loss of the American colonies deprived Britain of her dumping-ground for convicts, she had to find a new region in which to dispose of them; and this led to the first settlement of Australia, six years after the establishment of American independence. Finally, in the age of bitter religious controversy there was a constant stream of religious exiles seeking new homes in which they could freely follow their own forms of worship. The Puritan settlers of New England are the outstanding example of this type. But they were only one group among many. Huguenots from France, Moravians from Austria, persecuted 'Palatines' and Salzburgers from Germany, poured forth in an almost unbroken stream. It was natural that they should take refuge in the only lands where full religious freedom was offered to them; and these were especially some of the British settlements in America, and the Dutch colony at the Cape of Good Hope.

It is often said that the overflow of Europe over the world has been a sort of renewal of the folk-wandering of primitive ages. That is a misleading view: the movement has been far more deliberate and organised, and far less due to the pressure of external circumstances, than the early movements of peoples in the Old World. Not until the nineteenth century, when the industrial transformation of Europe brought about a really acute pressure of population, can it be said that the mere pressure of need, and the shortage of sustenance in their older homes, has sent large bodies of settlers into the new lands. Until that period the imperial movement has been due to voluntary and purposive action in a far higher degree than any of the blind early wanderings of peoples. The will-to-dominion of virile nations exulting in their nationhood; the desire to obtain a more abundant supply of luxuries than had earlier been available,

and to make profits therefrom; the zeal of peoples to impose their mode of civilisation upon as large a part of the world as possible; the existence in the Western world of many elements of restlessness and dissatisfaction, adventurers, portionless younger sons, or religious enthusiasts: these have been the main operative causes of this huge movement during the greater part of the four centuries over which it has extended. And as it has sprung from such diverse and conflicting causes, it has assumed an infinite variety of forms; and both deserves and demands a more respectful study as a whole than has generally been given to it.