

CANADA AND THE AMERICAS

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IN discussing any phase of foreign affairs, we in Canada have to remember that this country is just beginning to discover the outside world. As a nation, Canada is comparable to a small child who is only commencing to distinguish people as individuals, and whose acquaintanceship hardly extends outside the circle of his home. Thus we are familiar with our parents, in other words, our two parental lands Great Britain and the United States; we know something about our uncles and our aunts, the various nations of Europe; and we have a certain acquaintance with the peculiar peoples who live across the very wide street of the Pacific. China, for example, is a country to which missionaries go and from which laundrymen come. We therefore are aware that it exists.

However, there are people who live at the end of the street whom the small child never sees and of whose existence he is hardly conscious. These people do not pass his house: they go out from the street by another way. They are the Latin Americans. How many Canadians have ever seen an Argentinian, still less a Chilano, in the flesh? I suspect very few. For most of us, South America is still a space upon the map.

There is no reason why it should continue to be so. These countries down south are not as yet industrialized. They offer opportunities in trade. While speaking different languages from ourselves and having a different racial culture, they are nevertheless American. They have had somewhat the same frontier experience as ourselves, they are "new countries", and it would probably surprise us to find how readily we understood each other.

Between ourselves and the old world there is still a great gulf fixed, the gulf of historical development; you cannot put aside Europe's two thousand years of history. Fixed habits, fixed ideas, a sophisticated and adult civilization, these are obstacles to understanding which only with tremendous difficulty can be surmounted. In the new world such obstacles are not quite so formidable, for the historical experiences of the countries composing it have much in common.

Still, up to the present we Canadians have had very little to do with South America. Where we have touched it, we have approached it like any other capitalist nation. Thus a nominally

Canadian company exploits the oil fields of Venezuela, another runs the street railway of Rio de Janeiro. Both of these are thinly disguised American enterprises. There has also been some Canadian business enterprise directed towards Mexico, and our banks have developed branches in the British and foreign West Indies. Of ordinary trade between us and South America, country with country, there is not yet very much. This is regrettable, as South America offers a large field, a field which older nations have not hesitated to take advantage of.

Our relations with the southern continent, such as they are, have hitherto been mostly through the United States. That country has been much more aware of its own nature than have we, which is another way of saying that it is further along the road. For over a century, it has been vividly conscious that it is an American nation, and that its chief concern must be with the affairs of this hemisphere. We English Canadians are just waking up to the fact that we are no longer Europeans, that we live in a continent remote from both Europe and Asia, and that we have a kind of life that is our own. The United States, our second motherland—or shall we call it our stepmotherland?—having established its independence from Europe by force, has been aware of these things from the beginning. Its nationhood is therefore more self-conscious and more self-reliant than ours. It has had a longer experience, and knows the world better than we do.

The revolutionary struggle with England fixed the United States on its permanent course, that of isolation from Europe. The consequences of the Napoleonic wars added the second great principle of its foreign policy, the determination that if the United States did not interfere in European affairs, *per contra*, Europe must not interfere in American. This is the principle enunciated in the famous Monroe Doctrine, the message by President Monroe to Congress on Dec. 2, 1823:

....The American continents... are not henceforth to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.... In the wars of the European powers we have never taken any part, nor does it comport with our policy to do so... We owe it therefore to candour and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers to declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety. With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere. But with governments who have declared their independence and maintained it, and whose independence we have,

on great considerations and just principles acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power, in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition towards the United States.

While changes of emphasis and interpretation have from time to time occurred, the United States, in the intervening 114 years, has adhered closely to the spirit of the Monroe Doctrine. Thus in 1866, Napoleon III was ordered to take his French troops out of Mexico and found it expedient to obey. Similarly in 1895, Great Britain was ordered (the word is not too strong) to arbitrate the boundaries of British Guiana and Venezuela, and she, too, found it expedient to comply.

Despite this rôle of political guardianship, American relations with South America during the nineteenth century were not very close, and England and Germany easily outstripped the United States in trade with that continent. In the 1880's Mr. Blaine, President Cleveland's Secretary of State, determined to attempt to improve the American position. To this end, in 1889 he called a pan-American conference to discuss common affairs. Little was accomplished directly, though the present Pan-American Union was an indirect result. This body has an imposing house in Washington and a well paid secretary. Otherwise, it has been of somewhat minor moment. It has sprung into temporary life whenever a conference has been held, and then resumed its quiescence.

Still, the movement Blaine set going has never entirely subsided, and possibly it has not been without its practical results. Innumerable treaties and conventions embodying expressions of mutual esteem and promising peaceable behaviour have, partly as a consequence of the spirit of Pan-Americanism, been signed in the interval. Thus there are at present (1937) in force at least five of these agreements:—1. The Treaty to avoid or prevent conflicts between the American States, May 3, 1923. 2. The General Treaty of Inter-American Arbitration, Jan. 5, 1929. 3. The General Convention of Inter-American Conciliation, Jan. 5, 1929. 4. The Anti-War Treaty, Oct. 10, 1933. 5. The Buenos Ayres agreements of December, 1936. All of these have for their purpose the avoidance of war between the nations of the new world, but none of them has yet incorporated any effective principle of action. They mostly rest on committees for conciliation and arbitration:—attempts to get angry nations to take time to “think it over”.¹

1. See *Foreign Affairs*, Oct., 1936, for a detailed description of these pacts.

The meeting in December last appears to have had no more significant results than any of those preceding it. To say, as has been done, that it abolished the Monroe doctrine is nonsense. It removed some of the more invidious aspects of that doctrine, and soothed South American susceptibilities, but now, as ever, the principle remains that foreign aggression on this continent cannot be tolerated. That is a matter of life and death. The Buenos Ayres Conference neither "abolished" the essence of the Monroe doctrine nor did it materially affect the relations of South American countries with the League of Nations. Rather, as in previous conferences, everyone was extremely cordial, there were many Latin exuberances of good feeling, and then, when documents were signed, the usual "jokers" appeared in them, by which any nation can do virtually what it wishes in regard to them.

However, the cumulative effect of all these conferences must be considerable. Very slowly, the nations of the new world are learning to work together. It is no matter for discouragement that so little progress should have been made over fifty years, for humanity as a rule takes centuries to build up new modes of conducting its affairs. One of these days, the American nations will find that they have subscribed so often to the principle that disputes should be settled peaceably that they will really mean it. Rules are made, and then humanity wakes up to find that the rules it has made are its master. That is to some extent what has happened between Canada and the United States. We have subscribed so unreservedly to the principle of the rule of law that now it is part of us and conditions our thinking, so that there is very little danger of its being broken. In the same way the American nations are slowly building up a peace mentality.

Why does this country not share in the task? Mainly because, as was said, we are, internationally, still infants, and very timid infants. It is true that we have not very many direct connections with Latin America, but with no country have we more than with the United States. It might well be that if our representatives sat in these Pan-American conferences, they could whisper a timely word into Uncle Sam's ear. At any rate, whether we have direct interests or not, we have indirect interests. We surely are interested in seeing that certain things are not done. We therefore should be present.

Opposition in Canada comes from people who are very much afraid of any step that might pull us out of Great Britain's orbit. That cannot be accepted as a good principle. We must act as our best judgment dictates, and not be bound by mere tradition.

But even so, it is difficult to see why co-operation with our neighbours towards peace should pull us out of Great Britain's orbit. Rather it should enable us to play more effectively that rôle for which we are so often cast, but which I fail to see we assume, that of interpreter between Great Britain and the United States, between the old world and the new. It is to be remembered that Great Britain, while she has large commercial interests there, has virtually no colonies in South America. We would therefore appear in an especially good light and an especially effective position, having "no axe to grind".

Everything considered, then, while undue significance should not be attached to Pan-American gatherings and agreements, yet they are at least not backward steps, they have nothing in them of unfriendliness to the rest of the world and there is no argument that will stand any intellectual test for the Dominion of Canada to refrain from taking its place at them alongside the other nations of this continent, to whom even so self-distrusting a people as we Canadians may consider ourselves equal in stature.