

British and Russian Diplomacy

Author(s): A Diplomat

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BRITISH AND RUSSIAN DIPLOMACY.

BY A DIPLOMAT.

THE mad rush of the European Powers for new territories and markets in Africa and Asia is the dominant feature of their external activity in the latter half of our century. In Africa, Great Britain, favored by a start of nearly a hundred years and a matchless capacity for colonial enterprise, has kept ahead of every other nation. To-day the Boers are checking her plans, but as success in her present struggle is a question of life or death to her, we must be prepared to see her eventually win and carry out her scheme of a transcontinental empire or entirely collapse. To state the problem in this way is to solve it. In giving satisfaction to her highest commercial and military ambitions, the monumental creation she has undertaken will allow her to disregard the parallel exertions of competitors, even if crowned with a practical success equal to her own, the possibility of which is more than doubtful. In Asia, Great Britain has developed a career of conquest even more brilliant, distinguished from her achievements in Africa by political and military difficulties, the overcoming of which has been a triumph of the Anglo-Saxon genius worthy of our highest admiration, and by a wealth of gorgeous episode which appeals to the imagination like the chapters of a romance. But in Asia the establishments of England, her possessions and commercial interests, have encountered, within the last twenty years, dangers and obstacles more serious than those with which she is beset in Africa.

It were idle to deny that the feeling of confidence, crossed by temporary annoyance only, experienced by Great Britain in meditating on her destiny in Africa, must make way for one of preoccupation and uneasiness when she considers her position in Asia. English military and commercial circles, the former represented by the

highest authorities, like Lord Wolseley and Lord Roberts, have joined in sounding a note of alarm and in reasoning with the too numerous class of stubborn Englishmen who, in the blindness of their pride and ignorance, are confident that Great Britain will, somehow, always rise superior to the occasion, as she has so far done, and who will not admit the necessity for any change in her institutions and methods. The cause of this disturbance among thinking and observant Englishmen is the enormous place Russia has occupied, within the space of a hundred years, as a political factor in the world. No event in modern history is comparable in importance to the internal and external development of Russia and its expansion in every direction. No other country, not even Germany, has more reason than Great Britain to view with apprehension this mighty phenomenon. The direct contact which the Muscovite advance in Asia has established between Anglo-Saxon dominion and the great Slav Empire must deeply influence the destiny of the British people and the fate of the world.

The prediction of Napoleon, "*L'Europe sera républicaine ou Cosaque*," seems to be gaining plausibility, even in an extended sense, for the march of modern events may very well be interpreted to mean that the political problem of the world is getting gradually reduced to three or four, or at the outside five, factors—Great Britain, Russia, the United States, possibly Germany, and, if the yellow race awakens from its torpor in time, China. The force which would bring about this situation is that of the numerical strength of States. In this direction the possibilities of the three first named Powers are infinite, but those of Germany, although good as far as actual increase of population is concerned, are threatened by emigration and denationalization. The advantages of civilization cannot fail to acquire uniformity and international balance through a continuous process of endosmosis and exosmosis and owing to the universal character of science and arts. It does not seem unreasonable to say, then, that numbers will govern the world and determine the future grouping of humanity. The principle of nationalities, which is the only obstacle in the way of a simplification of the present political divisions of the world, is one whose career, although successful in the southeast of Europe, does not warrant the expectation of a failure of the policy of expansion through the absorption of inferior or weak races which suggests itself to-day to the great Powers.

Who is the optimistic politician who can predict anything but extinction to Holland, Belgium, Denmark and Norway and Sweden? And having foreseen this reduction of European factors, why should he stop at that point and go no further? Supposing, then, that the rollers of American, British, German, Russian and Chinese supremacy have crushed political and ethnical distinctions into five uniform masses, there are but two alternatives left: eternal peace on the basis of a federation of these five masses, or, what seems less probable, a further process of simplification, and again eternal peace on the basis of a fusion of the five into one government—Muscovite, in all likelihood, for her youth and strong rule are chances in favor of the survival of Russia? Universal federation will mean universal brotherhood in a restricted sense; universal fusion will mean universal brotherhood in an absolute sense; and what is considered as the highest dream of humanity will have been realized at the expense of principles which, with more than usual inconsistency, we cherish to-day to the point of staking our lives for them, although they mean, in the form of patriotism and national competitions, the prolongation of universal strife and hatred.

But, abandoning the deceptive mirages of speculation and going back to sober realities, I repeat that the meeting in Asia of Great Britain and Russia is fraught with tremendous consequences. It is the clashing of two great dreams, two plans for what is Caesarism on a gigantic scale. What are the conditions of the struggle?

After centuries of insular isolation, determining a peculiar orientation of ideas and a special cast of institutions, England has suddenly dropped into the condition of a continental Power. In running up against Russia in the neighborhood of India, practically on the frontier of India, in colliding with Russia in China and Persia, she does not come into contact with a detached portion of the Russian Power, represented by a colony or an isolated group of interests, but with the whole mass of the Russian Empire, which, having enjoyed the privilege of expanding continuously, forms one uninterrupted stretch of territory. Thus, England's superiority as a naval power, so decisive in her relations to Germany and France, who are both vulnerable to her attacks on their colonies, is of no avail against Russia, who, on the contrary, confronts her British rival with overwhelming military re-

sources and superior facilities of communication. In this way Russia is the mistress of the situation in the East. To this cause is principally due the eclipse of British influence in Turkey, China and Persia. In the great crisis which the new conditions of international life have created for England, she has been at a material disadvantage, which she is loath to meet with any change in her institutions; and yet she has lamentably failed in diplomacy, the only weapon left to her for securing compensation and balancing the chances of the struggle. It is a fact that, on every occasion, British statesmanship and diplomacy have been outwitted by Slav astuteness, which has secured a further advantage to Russia in the East.

It will be interesting to compare Russian with British diplomacy, to bring to light their respective methods, their merits and modes of action.

That part of statesmanship called diplomacy is the art employed by governments in their dealings with one another, or against one another, to obtain the most for the least, to secure, over and above such conditions as are guaranteed by natural law or by treaties or by the possession of superior power, advantages which may be won by resourcefulness in bargaining and skill in finesse, reinforced by unscrupulousness when necessary. This is not the official definition, I know, but the sole or even principal object of diplomacy is not, as some maintain, the defense of the members of a State in their rights and interests. This task is the routine and drudgery of diplomacy. It is performed mechanically, as it were, and without serious hitches, under the tutelar wing of international law—unless, indeed, one party is very inferior to the other in civilization, in which case the restraints of right and law are conveniently ignored. In its vital and essential aspects, what I must be pardoned for calling its higher flights, diplomacy is still to-day, as it has been from the time of its origin during the struggle of the Italian republics with the transalpine Powers down to Talleyrand and Bismarck, the art of deceiving and overreaching. If, as has been asserted, the American Commonwealth enjoys the privilege of possessing a diplomacy which has never stooped to the tortuous ways employed by others, it is not, as is implied, because the exercise of the craft can be, if its adepts be so minded or educated, directed solely by principles of directness, frankness and tact. It is because, until lately,

the United States has not been implicated in international politics, and its action abroad has been limited to the consideration of its commercial or social interests, whose defense is a task which can be performed in the light of day. By inaugurating an imperial policy and annexing the Philippines, the United States has plunged into the field of international rivalry and will soon feel the necessity of adopting the occult weapons of other Powers.

Diplomacy may achieve its ends, if they are frank and honest, through the instrumentality of a man like Franklin, who was guided throughout his foreign career by truth and common sense. Many a diplomatist reaches a venerable age in his profession without having practised it otherwise than in the form of learned discussions with Secretaries of State and references to texts and jurisprudence or appearances at stately balls and dinners. But even these must admit that, at least potentially, every diplomatist contains an agent committed to cunning and unscrupulousness, whose calling must find him ready to accomplish, when national interest claims it from him, acts which in private life would be considered immoral or criminal. If it were necessary to adduce proofs in support of the view given here of diplomacy, the disposal of secret funds, sometimes enormous, by most diplomatic agents, and the scandals connected with the activity of military attachés in different capitals, could be quoted as conclusive ones. Politics are governed by a special code of ethics—that which is contained in the maxim, “the end justifies the means;” and, although nations keep up the comedy of virtuous pretenses, they subscribe to acts of injustice or fraud performed in their behalf and secretly condone them. It is quite as much as humanity can do to create in its midst a sincere feeling of reprobation against private villainy. This is not stated as an apology for vice, but to show that the ethics of humanity, like everything else in the world, are a relative and conventional quantity, and that we will always find our infirm nature ready to seek relief from the restraints of conscience in the reservation of spheres of action where our primitive instincts can have full play. With nations it is the field of politics; with individuals it is the field of love. If, for instance, the strewing of a battlefield with thousands of human corpses in the name of national interest is a meritorious and even glorious action, while, on the contrary, the wilful destruction of one man by another in the name of private interest is condemned and

punished as a crime, why should the practices of diplomacy entail reprobation and odium, though the same practices in private life be destructive of reputation?

Diplomacy is essentially a game of observation and cleverness; one in which patience and caution alternate with boldness and promptness of action; in which intelligent management neutralizes the disadvantages of a naturally unfavorable situation, or even snatches victory out of the conditions of defeat; in other words, it is a game of poker, but poker in which peeping and other questionable devices are liberally practised. It follows that success in diplomatic enterprises depends mainly on agility and suppleness of thought, on elasticity of political conscience, on the powers of adaptability and assimilation, and not on any of the transcendent qualities of mind and character, which are too unwieldy and heavy to be of much use on the quicksands of international politics, where, indeed, they are likely to do more harm than good unless allied with great address. They will provoke admiration and esteem, but they will seldom lead to practical success.

Among the qualities indispensable to a good diplomatist, the most important are knowledge of human nature and skill in putting that knowledge to account. Psychology is the source of inspiration of diplomacy. An intelligent and, when occasion demands, unscrupulous use of the insight psychology gives into the workings of the brain and soul, is the triumph of diplomacy. Personal attractions and social accomplishments are among its most powerful adjuncts.

The golden age of diplomacy was in the time of absolute monarchs or ministers, when the action of States depended not on definitely fixed conceptions of national interest, but on the ideas and passions of one man; when kings were governed by fair favorites, and these in turn by lieutenants of the body guard; when a witty word or timely compliment turned the political scales, and when golden weights restored them to their former balance. To-day, the opportunities of diplomacy have considerably decreased. Scientific conceptions of the nature of the State have, in most cases, transferred its centre of gravity from the sovereign to the nation. Closely defined and rationally elaborated commercial and political ideals have taken the place of the fumbling, empirical and dishonest methods of the past. The mutual relations of most of the modern States are governed by fixed

rules, which act, as it were, automatically and leave little room for the display of diplomatic talent. International negotiations are reduced to-day, in American and European capitals, to the solution of mathematical equations from which personal factors are nearly entirely eliminated, and in which hard facts and figures provided by statistics are opposed to one another by men responsible to public opinion, so that the possibility of one party's gaining a marked advantage over the other is very small indeed. Mutual concessions, "give and take," are the principles on which they are conducted. The discussions are carried on with the help of specialists, commercial, technical and military, so that often only a nominal direction is left to the diplomatic agent.

But, although in America and Europe the possibilities of diplomacy have narrowed down to the maintenance of mutual good will between nations, or the conclusion or prevention of alliances by appeals made to reason, national interest or national feeling, in Asia a wide field of action exists for the higher arts of the craft. There, European Governments meet the native authorities and one another on the ground of stealth, duplicity, treachery and corruption. There, local conditions of weakness and putrefaction foster unclean ambitions in the foreign breast, and have established between the European Powers a deadly rivalry which has recourse to every means suggested by unscrupulousness. In a general way, the greater the corruption in a country, the weaker and more degraded the character of its people, the greater is the sway of diplomacy. Secrecy and the prohibition of discussion relating to public affairs, such as exists in autocratic countries, provide it with additional chances. Turkey, China, Persia and all the other countries which make up the East, represent, with the exception of reformed Japan, the promised land of the diplomatist. There, humanity offers the Mephisto, disguised in embroidered uniform and cocked hat, an unusually abundant crop of weaknesses and vices to trade on. The diplomatist develops into perfection and dominates most in the midst of ignorance, degradation and corruption.

The knowledge of the inner workings of diplomacy and of the qualities it exacts from its adepts, as shown above, will help to explain the superiority of the Russian over the Briton in this particular branch of political activity.

A citizen of Great Britain is brought up as a boy in an at-

mosphere of intense physical culture, which is the best preservative against mean instincts. It gives rise among the young, through the early opposition of characters and ambitions under sound pedagogic tuition, to a code of moral precepts of which manliness, with all its component attributes of truthfulness, fairness, personal dignity and pride, is the most prominent. As a grown-up man, he lives in an atmosphere of political liberty, administrative legality and honesty, and varied opportunity for success in life, which leaves no room for the exercise of any of those human impulses which entail a diminution of self-respect or an attempt on the weaknesses of others. These conditions of life stamp the minds and hearts of the British with an indelible mark of uprightness and a conception of duty to self and one another based on a high appreciation of humanity. As a consequence, they are unbending, unobservant, slow to read the character of others. They are loath to admit evil, and superior to the utilization of the opportunities which the accidental revelation of human frailty may offer them. Their nature is simple and their organization muscular, not nervous. Sport is their god. Science, art, love, do not play in their existence the same rôle as in that of other races. In an absolute sense, it is difficult to deny that they achieve morally and socially a very high, perhaps the highest, type of humanity; but in the exercise of diplomacy their qualities turn to their disadvantage. Land an Englishman on the diplomatic stage, and, nine times in ten, he is bound to play his part poorly, though animated by the greatest good will. I say "animated by good will" because, like every other country, indeed more than any other country, Great Britain, notwithstanding the individual character of her citizens, entertains and carries out a policy of covetousness leading to the spoliation of others.

Owing to a process of self-deception rarely practised by Englishmen in private life, but for which their intense and blind patriotism is a frequent occasion, this policy is approved of readily by the community on the plea of the civilizing mission of Great Britain. The agent entrusted with its application gives it his whole heart and soul, and even condescends to dabble in the black art of diplomacy for its furtherance; but in this work he is handicapped by constitutional stiffness of mind and character. It is easier for him to be brutal and cruel than to be mean, cunning and false. His nature is to hew his way through difficulties, and not

to slip past them or dig his way under them. His natural distaste for trickery appears in the clumsiness with which he resorts to it. When he has struck a bargain for the purchase of a conscience, he carries out the terms with a bad grace expressive of high contempt for the degraded object of his designs, and he destroys in that way half of the effect of seduction. The maintenance of British rule in India is supposed to be a masterpiece of human skill, and, indeed, the machinery of government England has established there works admirably to-day. But it is founded more on principles of force and administrative efficiency than on principles of policy. By her contempt for the natives expressed in acts of brutality and impatience, by her inability to enter into their prejudices and to flatter their weaknesses, by her arrogant assumption of superiority of race upon every occasion, she destroys the effects of an otherwise beneficent, and in some ways skilful, rule, and keeps up a ferment of hatred among all classes, which has once already brought the Indian Empire within an inch of destruction, and justifies the opinion that another outbreak is possible and may be fraught with more terrible consequences. If it be true that this attitude forms deliberately part of her policy, as being a dangerous but the only means of dealing successfully with Orientals, how is it that Russia maintains her authority in Asia more firmly, to all appearances, by acting on opposite lines? All the successes of Great Britain are due to the unique advantages of her geographical position, to brutal force and timely luck intervening, in the shape of an unexpected combination of events, to maintain her threatened fortunes, none to foresight, sagacity or a deeply meditated plan of action. She has always dropped into situations unawares, turning them, "*après coup*" to account, thanks to her massive doggedness and pluck, but feeling rather surprised at the favorable turn of events. Her African policy alone in its last phase is the result of a well-defined conception of the future, but then what blindness, what carelessness and unpreparedness in the execution!

With his education and disposition, an Englishman is rarely a success socially except among his congeners. He is wanting in the art of conversation, graceful manners and flattery, what the French sum up in the expressions "*entregent*" and "*savoir-vivre*." When he appeals to womankind, it is as a fine physical specimen of humanity, tall, muscular, sporty, and on his cheeks the color

of the beef on which he is fed, deepened by exposure to the sun—an enviable form of attraction, assuredly, and one which is enhanced by the special charm emanating from its combination with the very awkwardness of the individual. But, as it takes two to quarrel, it takes two to get on, and the average Englishman is muscle-plated against the seduction of woman, as such. He is distant, cold and haughty, and disliked in proportion, and, it must be added, secretly respected in proportion. Consequently, if by any chance he combines foreign blandishments with his manly insular accomplishments and condescends to meet non-British humanity on terms of equality, he becomes the rage, for then he realizes a type which is full of novelty, and he appeals to that unlovely disposition of man to prize secretly, as a favor, any departure from frigidity on the part of the reserved and indifferent.

Several instances, taken from recent history, will show the clumsiness of English diplomacy. In the Armenian question—one in which humane purpose was allowed to have claims on the attention of the British Government to the extent of becoming the spring of intense official action—an initial mistake, according to the politician—Lord Rosebery and, after him, Lord Salisbury adopted methods whose failure any but an English statesman could have foreseen. It was they who, entertaining an object estimable in itself, but blemished by the introduction of feelings of spite and vengeance against Turkey for past grievances, pandered to hysterical agitation and transformed what was, no doubt, a harrowing episode of suffering, though such as exists in many countries, into an appalling tragedy, thus wrecking the existence of the people they were championing, who better advised might have steered out of their difficulties, and utterly ruining the prestige of the English name in the East—nay, holding it up to the anathemas of their very *protégés*. Continuing a policy of empty threats and intimidation, practised since the eighties, in place of the tactics formerly pursued at Constantinople, indulging on every occasion in a wanton display of contempt and provocation, for which Sir Philip Curry was an admirably chosen instrument as Ambassador at Constantinople, the English played with amazing naïveté into the hands of the Russians, and finally found themselves obliged to beat an ignominious retreat. It will take some time for the Irishman who acts to-day as British Ambassador at Constantinople, with a mission to inaugurate a more sensible

policy, to repair the effect of the blunders dictated to his predecessor by the Foreign Office.

In China and Persia, the decline of British supremacy and the corresponding increase of Russian influence—for it is always England or Russia in those parts—speak as eloquently of the inefficiency of Her Gracious Majesty's diplomacy.

The success of British exertions to achieve popularity in the United States, or rather to improve what was a desperate situation, is due more to accident than superior art. Without the Spanish war and the opportunity it afforded to England to render the States an immense service, we would probably still be witnessing, on this side of the Atlantic, the state of mind which resulted in the famous message of President Cleveland in the matter of the Venezuelan frontier. The brutal temper of British statesmanship broke out on the occasion of this war, as on so many others. The United States had to be gained over to Great Britain; therefore, it was natural and fit for her, apart from moral considerations, to proclaim her sympathy with the champions of Cuban independence. But in the name of what necessity, unless it be that of satisfying an irresistible inclination for blundering, did Lord Salisbury insult Spain by publicly ranking her with the degenerate and dying Powers, however true this might be in reality? Would it not have been better to have left those words unsaid than to say them, and then try to make amends by declaring, as Lord Salisbury did in a recent speech, that Spain, with industry and perseverance, had still a happy future before her?

I pass now to the Russian diplomacy. The Russian is differently equipped for the exercise of diplomatic duties. As a member of the Slav race, he is endowed with a natural flexibility of character which is wonderful and enables him to adapt himself to any circumstances. At school, his education is not as healthy, either morally or physically, as that of the Englishman, and it is more directed toward the improvement of the mind than of the body and soul. At home, he is familiarized with a state of society whose principal traits are subserviency to political power, mental and moral restraint in the wrong sense, and a complete dependency on official patronage for success in life. As a result, the Russian enters the competition of life restricted to the fields of functionalism and militarism, naturally prepared for and educated to artfulness. These defects carry along with them their qualities. He

possesses all the external graces which the Englishman lacks, or he can adorn himself with them at will, which is the same thing for practical purposes. He shines in society with all the advantages derived from wit, versatility of manner and mind, the desire and the talent to please. Superior to the Frenchman, who is shallow, blinded by offensive conceit and always on personal exhibition for the sake of *gloriole*, he is armed with deep purpose, tact and penetration. Thus, he has in his make the elements of the diplomatist *par excellence*. His reputation as such is absolutely justified. The Russian diplomatic service is one of the most formidable machines in existence, comparable in many respects to the Jesuit organization. It exhibits the same deeply planned and unswerving purpose, the same discipline, the same merciless elimination of worthless elements, the same spirit of sacrifice, the same resourcefulness. The Russian Government knows exactly what it wants, forms plans for a distant future and carries them out with a steadfastness and tenacity of purpose to be secured only by the conditions of autocracy. From its agents it demands success, and does not care how it is obtained. The practice of Russian diplomatic agents in places where it pays to do so, as in the East and in the Balkan countries and maybe others, is to inquire not only into the political conditions of the State, but also into the workings of Society, written with a capital S. There is no household of importance into which his curiosity does not throw a searching glance. Domestic troubles, the relations of husband to wife, the morality of both, a loss at cards, the amount owing to the butcher—all these items of information and many others are greedily collected, some by the agent himself, the greater part by his subordinates, whose mission it is to be watchful and report everything they see and hear. This information is classified, docketed and combined so as to be turned to account for political purposes at a favorable moment. How far unscrupulousness of method is carried by these arch-diplomatists it is unnecessary to specify. Recent events in China and in the Balkan peninsula are sufficiently eloquent.

The result of such an organization is evident. Russia triumphs everywhere. Her interests in Turkey are as important as those of England, and though she is in a far better position than her rival to carry out threats she has recourse to this means only in the last extremity, always preferring the insinuating and unctuous

methods of diplomacy which spare pride and vanity, the two deepest motives of humanity. It is wonderful to watch her tactics in the East, where she knows that success is a question mainly depending on the art of ingratiating. With admirable skill she lays herself out to win the good graces, not only of persons in actual power, but of any and every individual whom a jerk in the balance of imperial favor may some day invest with important functions—that is to say, everybody. She neglects no one, and is “*aux petits soins*” with every native to whom her caresses and flatteries are all the more delightful because the European world is generally so contemptuous, indifferent or brutal to him. She follows the careers of native officials with jealous attention, recommends and pushes those who show the dispositions that suit her, puts obstacles in the way of the others. Not only does she excel in taking advantage of opportunities, but she is unsurpassable in the art of creating them. In a word, she is masterful in the highest degree and proportionately successful.

This comparison between Great Britain and Russia in the walks of diplomacy has not been undertaken to give expression to a preference for the former or criticism of the latter. Neither is its object to censure the methods of diplomacy or to approve of them. It is simply a statement of facts, meant to serve as a contribution to the comprehension of the political action of States in the busy and complicated struggle which secretly rages between them, until it breaks out into the flames of war.

Before concluding, I should like to correct the impression which may possibly be derived from the foregoing pages as to the personal character of diplomatists. Outsiders should not forget that the diplomatist is a dual personality. He is an official and, as such, a machine, acting according to the laws of movement and not according to those of the human heart and conscience. Details lose their importance in the magnitude of his object, just as the miseries of war are overlooked by a statesman working for the greatness of his country. But he is also a private individual, and, in this capacity, he may be, and generally is, a gentleman and a human being, endowed with sensibilities often sharpened by the necessity of a reaction from the turpitude of official work. Family and social life is to him what a plunge in a clear stream is to the miner after the accomplishment of some grimy task in the bowels of the earth.

A DIPLOMAT.