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BY

A. F. MORRISON

Read before the Chit-Chat Club, of San Francisco,
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THE MONROE DOCTRINE.

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THE Monroe Doctrine, as it is understood to-day, is something different from what it was at the time of its declaration by President Monroe. The Monroe declaration, aside from the political events that immediately called it forth, was the embodiment of a national sentiment which had grown and developed among our people. But the Monroe Doctrine, as it is understood to-day, is much more comprehensive than the simple declaration made by Monroe. It represents a larger growth and a further development.

What that doctrine is, has never been authoritatively defined. Our understanding of what it is, and its scope, must be gathered from the history of our country and the declarations of our Presidents and other distinguished statesmen, as precedents.

As in the case of the "balance of power" with Europe, we know that our nation believes that the maintenance of the Monroe Doctrine is necessary to our safety and welfare. And, like the "balance of power," the doctrine seems to be flexible and elastic; and doubtless the scope of its assertion will, in a large measure, depend upon the circumstances under which it may be invoked.

It will be seen, therefore, that an intelligent understanding of this doctrine must be derived from a review of the events which constitute its history.

As the people of the United States emerged from the

period of the Revolution and the Confederation, and as the spirit and sentiment of nationality gained deeper root, the vision of a mighty destiny grew upon them until it became an abiding conviction. As the country grew and prospered under a democratic constitution, original to our people, and without a prototype, the further conviction took deep and vigorous root that this nation had a mission to perform in spreading the light and exemplifying the blessings of democratic institutions among the nations of the earth, and especially among the peoples who inhabited these American continents. As the result of two fierce wars with the most powerful nation of the world, we early had what may be called a "past," which was filled with national heroes and with the traditions of heroic deeds. The traditions of those wars kindled and fanned the fires of patriotism, while the consciousness of a great mission and the vision of a great destiny gave a direction and a scope to that patriotism which made it apostolic and extra-territorial, so far as the immediate national boundaries were concerned. Besides all this, the American people had made their country an asylum for those who were disaffected with the tyranny and harsh conditions of the Old World. The fact that they were maintaining such an asylum under the very eyes of the reactionary despotisms then pervading the Old World made the people of this nation feel conscious, and perhaps rightly so, that the success and example of their free institutions were ungrateful things in the eyes of the Old World despotisms. As a result of this consciousness, our people grew suspicious, apprehensive, and jealous of all political influences that might emanate from the Old World. They felt that the preservation of their own institutions depended on their holding aloof from entangling alliances with Europe, and

in discouraging European intervention in the political affairs of the American continents.

A solemn and influential expression of the first of these feelings was given in Washington's farewell address; and the declaration there made has profoundly affected the policy of this country. Washington said:

"The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is, in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop.

"Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote, relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities.

"Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course. If we remain one people, under an efficient government, the period is not far off when we may defy material injury from external annoyance; when we may take such an attitude as will cause the neutrality we may at any time resolve upon to be scrupulously respected; when belligerent nations, under the impossibility of making acquisitions upon us, will not lightly hazard the giving us provocation; when we may choose peace or war, as our interest, guided by justice, shall counsel.

"Why forego the advantage of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalship, interest, humor, or caprice?"

But the first distinctively American territorial system or policy — a policy that would exclude European influences from the political affairs of this continent, — seems

to have been conceived and developed by Jefferson. When Secretary of State, in Washington's Cabinet, he labored persistently to acquire from Spain the right to the free navigation of the Mississippi, and also the cession of an *entrepot* at the mouth of that river. During the time these negotiations were pending, a rupture between England and Spain became imminent, and Jefferson became fearful that England would take advantage of such a war to seize the Spanish possessions lying on our border, including Florida and Louisiana.

On August 12, 1790, he wrote to Gouverneur Morris, the United States informal agent in Great Britain, a letter, in which he says that the conduct of the British Ministry proves that—

"They view a war as very possible; and some symptoms indicate designs against the Spanish possessions adjoining us. The consequence of their acquiring all the country from the St. Croix to the St. Mary's are too obvious to you to need development. You will readily see the dangers which would then environ us. We wish you, therefore, to intimate to them that we cannot be indifferent to enterprises of this kind. That we should contemplate a change of neighbors with extreme uneasiness; and that a due balance on our borders is not less desirable to us, than a balance of power in Europe has always appeared to them. We wish to be neutral, and we will be so, if they will execute the treaty fairly and attempt no conquests adjoining us."

On October 29, 1808, while we were surrounded by the possessions of European powers on all sides, and before the Spanish Colonies had revolted, Jefferson, then President, wrote to William C. C. Claiborne, the Governor of the Territory of Orleans, as follows:

"The truth is that the patriots of Spain have no warmer friends than the administration of the United States; but it is our duty to say nothing and to do

nothing for or against either. If they succeed, we shall be satisfied to see Cuba and Mexico remain in their present dependence; but very unwilling to see them in that of either France or England, politically or commercially. We consider their interests and ours as the same, and the object of both must be to exclude all European influence from this hemisphere. . . .

"These are sentiments which I wish you to express to any proper characters of either of these two countries, and particularly that we have nothing more at heart than their friendship."

On August 4, 1820, in a letter to William Short, Jefferson speaks of conversations which he had lately had with the Abbé Correa, who for a number of years had been Portuguese Minister at Washington, but who had lately been appointed by the Government of Portugal as Minister to Brazil; and he says:

"From many conversations with him, I hope he sees, and will promote in his new situation, the advantages of a cordial fraternization among all the American nations, and the importance of their coalescing in an American system of policy totally independent of and unconnected with that of Europe. The day is not distant when we may formally require a meridian of partition through the ocean which separates the two hemispheres, on the hither side of which no European gun shall ever be heard, nor American on the other; and when during the rage of the eternal wars of Europe, the lion and the lamb, within our regions, shall lie down together in peace. . . . The principles of society there and here, then, are radically different, and I hope no American patriot will ever lose sight of the essential policy of interdicting in the seas and territories of both Americas the ferocious and sanguinary contests of Europe."

But Jefferson's ideas were, even at this time, somewhat advanced, as will be seen from the following declaration, made this same year (1820) by that sterling American statesman, John Quincy Adams. Mr. Adams was then