

**THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY, A MAGAZINE
OF LITERATURE, SCIENCE, ART, AND
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DECEMBER, 1898.- NO. CCCCXCIV. THE
UNITED STATES AND THE CONTROL OF
THE TROPICS, PP. 721-860**

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by Benjamin Kidd

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BENJAMIN KIDD

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Benjamin Kidd

THE UNITED STATES AND THE CONTROL OF THE TROPICS.

THE editor of The Atlantic Monthly has written me the following letter:—

"In your suggestive volume on the control of the tropics you declare it futile that any first-class world-power should hope in the future to fold its hands and stand aloof from the tropics. You say that there can be no choice in the matter, and that with the filling up of the temperate regions and the continued development of industrialism, rivalry for the trade of the tropics will be the largest factor in the era upon which we are entering. You declare that, by reason of past experience, we have now come face to face with the following conclusions regarding the tropics:—

"The ethical development that has taken place in our civilization has rendered the experiment once made to develop their resources by forced native labor no longer possible, or permissible, even if possible."

"We have already abandoned, under pressure of experience, the idea, which at one time prevailed, that the tropical regions might be occupied and permanently colonized by European races, as vast regions in the temperate climes have been."

"Within a measurable period in the future, and under pressure of experience, we shall probably also have to abandon the idea, which has in like manner prevailed for a time, that the colored races, left to themselves, possess the qualities necessary to the development of the rich resources of the lands they have inherited."

"The only method left, therefore, in your opinion, is that the tropics must be governed from a base in the temperate regions; and, in particular,—and in this you make a new departure,—be governed by the nations which undertake such work as a trust for civilization. [This solution of the problem of the tropics Great Britain has begun to make in the case of Egypt. But Great Britain is already a world-wide empire, and has developed by long experience the methods and machinery for exercising such control.

"You refrain, in your book on the control of the tropics,—no doubt purposely,—from saying whether, in your judgment, the United States has incurred obligations by her victory over Spain to take a share in the development of the tropics, and whether the United States is politically able to enter upon such a career. The body of opinion in the United States that opposes a policy of expansion bases its objections on these three propositions: (1) that the traditions of the United States are directly and strongly opposed to a policy of expansion, and have been so opposed from George Washington's Farewell Address to the present time; (2) that a dangerous if not an insuperable practical difficulty to a policy of expansion is found in the inefficient civil service of the United States; and (3) that the control of colonies is illogical for the United States, because such a policy directly contradicts the fundamental proposition on which the

republican form of government rests, — that it shall consist only of self-governing commonwealths. In view of these objections, do you hold that the United States could safely enter upon a policy of expansion?"

The questions asked in this letter are so very important, and bear so closely upon a great public issue about which it is the right and duty of the people of the United States alone to express a direct opinion, that I feel some difficulty in replying to them. Let me take the propositions in order, and deal first with the policy of expansion. I have recently been traveling over a large part of the United States, particularly in the West. I have been as far west as the Pacific coast, passing over two main lines of communication, out one way and back another, stopping at various places, and living amongst the people a good deal. On this subject of expansion I talked with the people generally. It was impossible to avoid the subject. I was struck by two great bodies of opinion, as I might call them, on the question of expansion. One of these I might describe as being a sort of unreasoning body of opinion; that is to say, it has not been reasoned out. It takes the shape in the popular mind of a pronounced and even intense feeling that in this matter of expansion the duty of the United States is clear. Ask the farmers and business men in the West why the course which they propose is the duty of America. They will give no direct reason or logical reason, as far as I could find out. But they are, nevertheless, perfectly decided about one thing, and that is "that this thing has got to be done." You ask, "What thing?" and they reply, "Why, that America should keep a stiff upper lip to the world; should hold that which she has not sought, but which has come to her; should keep what she has got." She must, in short, in a favorite phrase, be "true to her own destiny."

Now that is one body of opinion. There is also another great body of opinion, largely prevailing amongst the reasoning classes in the United States. Many men of this class undoubtedly hold strongly that the government is about to embark upon a very responsible experiment, — perhaps an experiment in which there is a considerable element of danger.

With regard to the first body of opinion, which is a serious force it seemed to me in most places, I tried to explain to myself what this feeling is which finds expression as "the destiny of America" now to be carried forward in a policy of expansion. I can only put the matter in the shape in which it has presented itself to my own mind.

To get at the underlying meaning of that great phase of world-development which is now culminating in the United States, it would appear to be necessary to go a little distance back into the past: we must take up the threads of European history. As European history is coming to be understood at the present day, there is a principle which is gradually emerging into the view of the student, and growing clearer and clearer even to the general mind. If we look back over a short period it may perhaps fail to attract attention, but when we extend the view over a few centuries there can be no mistaking it. At first sight this historic principle of development or principle of movement in European affairs may be described as the gradual movement of power northward; when it is regarded more closely, it is possible to see that it is something more than this. Underneath all the outward national quarrels of Europe there has been going on for centuries what is really a struggle between what we might call the Latin type of civilization, represented by the southern races, and that type of civilization which has been developed in northern Europe.

We first catch sight of it early in the