

“ARMENIA TO ONE MANDATORY, THE ARMENIANS TO ANOTHER“

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English humor is not like ours. It's the opposite. American, humor consists, in part, at least, in what is

said; the British in what a Britisher doesn't say. This Briton obviously liked heartily what I said. I thought he was going to laugh with joy—or something; he swelled up till he looked like the British Empire; as if about to burst. But he didn't burst; he didn't laugh; he didn't say anything that showed the slightest sign of humor. All he said, after a long pause, was:

"Right-o."

And then, after another pause, when he had recovered his self-determination, he spoke seriously, rather dully, in fact, our American idealism. He thought it fine; I thought he thought it a bit too fine. We Americans were; too idealistic. And he thought the Armenians too practical. We were correctives, the one on the other, therefore; we were cure for them, they for us; both desperate cases, especially the Armenians.

I gathered that he had some inexpressible sympathy or—let me rather say—some knowledge or experience of the Armenians that gave him a human understanding for the Turks (and all the other near neighbors of the Armenians), who are forever trying to kill off this orphan race. He seemed to think that was the only thing to do to the Armenians. He didn't say so. You may observe that I do not quote this authority very freely. The reason is that his method was, apparently, not to say anything himself, but to get me to say the things he wished to have printed in such a form that he could, if necessary, deny them. So he did not say that the Armenians should be killed off. He only gave me the impression, at the time, that that was the sole solution of the Armenian problem; and that that was his reason for desiring us Americans to take on the job. He felt, or he made me feel, that the Turks shouldn't do it; they were too rough and ready—and not Christians. Nor the Greeks; they enjoyed it too much and were inefficient; they never finish anything, and when their aesthetic pleasure in the killing of Armenians was sated they quit. And so with all the other old rival races. They stopped work before all the Armenians were dead. Even when they all went at the task together they invariably left a couple here and a couple there: Adams and Eves who, the moment one's back was turned, bred and bred and bred so that the next time one visited Armenia there were the Armenians as before, millions of them, all meek and lovely, but busy by day at business and at night secretly breeding and slyly spreading and spreading and—

He spread all over me his Malthusian despair and such a dread of the Armenians that I was about to swallow whole his whole scheme, for the American-Armenian mandate when my saving American humor gave me pause.


"But why should not the British do this job also?" I asked, and, to warn his sense of humor that I was striving to be not altogether final but funny withal, I smiled. In vain. He had no sense of American humor—I think. He waited for my genial grin to go away and then, when he saw I was alone again and quite serious, he answered me seriously. ..

A perfect massacre of the Armenians, he reasoned, might make a scandal, if the British did it, and, he explained, though the Empire had withstood some such shocks and must, of course, withstand

others, too many more just now might jar it. And the Empire should not be jarred, unnecessarily, just now. The British Empire is the beginning of world government. All our great troubles—wars, revolutions, strikes, plagues, etc. — all came from the fact that the earth as a whole was not governed as a whole. The British will end this anarchism someday. But the Empire is young as yet, comparatively small, weak and overburdened. Think of the islands, colonies, strategic points, seas and trade routes— all the new burdens and responsibilities thrown upon the British Empire by the defeat of German Imperialism! No, The Empire must be spared for the present. Later, when the freedom of the seas is put ashore, so to speak; when British rule is extended from the wave to the land, all lands, then Great Britain could, and it would, go forth gladly to meet a shock like the one I—he said I—was proposing in Armenia; but not yet, not now; .not in the infancy of the Empire.

Moreover, he conveyed, British Imperialism, at this stage, was interested rather in natural resources than in peoples as such. The English are a practical folk; not idealistic, you understand. They realize that a world government must be founded, not like your "League of Nations, upon ideas and ideals, principles and peoples, but upon solid things—oil, ore, air, the sea.

"But," I argued (and you can see how far he was carrying me on: I argued for his country against my own). "But," I said, "there are rich lands and fat deposits in Armenia."

He was still. He was so still so long that I thought I had floored him; that he had not known about the wealth of Armenia. But I noticed again that tendency to swell and go to pieces. And how I did  wish he would laugh! It would have relieved me and him, too, I think. But no, he didn't laugh; he didn't even smile. He just waited till he could and then he reminded me that I had heard, as he said he had, that Armenia was to be divided. The back country, where the natural wealth is, was to be cut off from the front, where there is nothing but Armenians. The American mandate was to be over the Armenians; some other ally —not the British, but another equally practical power—was to get Armenia.

"But," I objected, "what is the use of the natural wealth of a country without the people to work it? Mines, oil deposits, fat lands—natural resources," I explained patiently to him, "are no good to Capital without Labor to dig and develop them. And the natives of a country are the natural labor thereof; the cheapest, the most obedient, the least organized, the best."

He was bored, I could see, but he was polite; he listened, so I gave him examples one after the other, from the American as well as from the British colonies, to show him that it was a mistake to separate the people of a country from the resources of that country. They must be worked together, developed together, and—they were usually. There was no other way. I pictured to him the helplessness of the Turks or the French bankers, or any non-working people, trying to get out the riches of Armenia without the Armenians. And I would up with what struck me is a very good line.

"I am crying," I cried, "not idealistically, not 'Armenia for the Armenians' but practically 'the Armenians for Armenia.'"

He looked me up and down with interest, I thought, as if he were getting some new view of us Americans. I had told him he didn't know us, and he had declared that he did.

"Any conscious Englishman," I remember he said, "can understand any unconscious American."

Just what he meant by that I don't quite see, but it was remarks like that which gave me the uneasy impression that he had got us all wrong and I had made up my mind to show him before he was through with me that we Americans are not all such sheer idealists as he and most Europeans seemed to have inferred from the one example of President Wilson and the 14. But he was too long and too silent in his study of me. I began to feel that he was finding some fault in me or us. Perhaps I had leaned too far toward the practical side; I recalled how he disappointed of the Armenians for that. I hedged therefore. I spoke more idealistically again and, I trust, patriotically.

"If we Americans took over the Armenians," I declared, "we would do it for their good. We should govern them always with the idea of making them fit to govern themselves."

"Yes, yes, we understand all, that," he said. But I felt that he didn't, so I went right on with my syllogism.

"Well, then," I said tactfully, "you must see also that to that end: to make the-Armenians fit to govern themselves we should have to make them work. And since you cannot work a people without something to work them on, we should need the mines and the land of Armenia not to get the riches out of them, but as a training ground whereon to teach the people industry, thrift and —all the Christian virtues which go into the making of good men and good citizens."

He looked puzzled, swollen. I didn't know what was the matter with him till he decided at last to express himself.

"There's no lack of thrift in the Armenians," he said dryly, "and, of course, you know, that they are Christians, arch Christians?"

Of course I knew that. I had merely, in my enthusiasm, forgotten it for the moment. He had me there, however, so I backed up on work and I stuck—and I stick—to work.

"But," I said, "the Armenians must work. That is the secret of success whether for an individual or a nation— work, hard work. And the Armenians must have Armenia to work on."

"Armenians won't work," he said "That is the trouble with your plan and that is the trouble with the Armenians. That is the trouble, really, with all these old races that have been civilized, learned the game and, having once dominated the world and worked it, have lost control, gone back, as you say; or, as I say, carried on. They have gone forward logically, psychologically, physiologically. They do not care for hard labor. It is that which distinguishes them from the childlike, truly backward nations you Americans have had to do with. Primitive peoples are merely lazy. They can be forced forward, worked, developed, exploited, if you please. There is some hope for them; some use. But these

forward peoples, the ex-civilized nations— they are not lazy. They are too intelligent to work for others. They are exploiters themselves, instinctive, inbred, incorrigible, hopeless.

"All nations are breeding men. They talk about developing their countries, but it's the other way around: their countries are developing them. And the old nations show the kind of men the new nations are making. These old peoples are the result of evolution. You can see on the shores of the Mediterranean what you are selecting, breeding, evolving at home, now. The living among the old races here are the survivor of a civilization, commercial in character, like yours."

"Ours," I corrected, to get the English into it. He drove right over me.

"You new nations have got to learn from the old peoples," he repeated, "that the modern representatives of the ex-great and ex-famous nation are the inevitable, the natural products of the artificial selection of an order of society which imprisons the courageous, deports the original, depresses the mass, discourages any sort of variation; from the average of the species and preserves the meek mean, sly, shrewd and thrifty. For these are the commercially fit. The modern Greeks are the direct heirs and their unpleasant characteristics are the enduring traits descended from the ancient Greek culture—as the old Greeks actually practised it; not as the great, exceptional Greeks talked and sang; and carved it, but as the average Greeks practised it in business—the Greeks, I mean, who sentenced Socrates to death. The Egyptians as we British inherit them, are the great-great-great little grandchildren of Egyptian culture, the belated answer, to the riddle of Sphinx which their great-grandfathers raised up so beautifully out of their childlike labor. The Arab of today is .the dust-of the desert dried by the arts, the customs, the business, of ancient, glorious Arabia—"

He stopped another protest of mine, anticipating it: "The Greeks of old, and the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Turks and the rest, they had their geniuses too—their poets and artists, their generals who conquered backward peoples and captains of industry who gave them employment, and they had their own Labor also. But the picked breeds, the aristocracies, plutocracies did not last. Their descendants did not descend, they didn't even survive. The children of the successful, of the rich, of the powerful, the privileged, went to the dogs, and they will with you. And the succeeding generations of Labor, overworked, underfed, dispirited and disciplined, reduced to dull slaves, died or were killed off. It was the middle class that proved and proves fit survive in that sort of organization of society, the lower middle class. So you have all the ancient world peopled now with practically nothing but business men, little business men—merchants, traders, shopkeepers, money-lenders, peddlers, non-producers. They will buy and sell, and, descended from buyers and sellers, selected through many generations of commercial competition, they do go anywhere in the world to trade; not to create, not to organize, build, plan, labor. Their brothers who did those things are the childless dead. Not only the merest, shrewdest traders live and them we find everywhere beating their way. I have met Arabs in the Straits, Colonies, South America, — peddling, trading, getting rich. And a for the Syrians, Greeks, Armenians—"

"And-Jews," I suggested. He ignored me.

"My old peoples," he said, "will go anywhere where there are workers to work, venturing slyly, suffering meekly, saving money, working. Yes, they work. They work as a laborer won't work. They work as only a business man will work—long, hard, close upon a narrow margin of profit. But," he distinguished, "they will not labor. They can't. They cannot see 'work for wages.' It is an instinct with them, a trait, an intelligence developed as we develop pointing in a pointer dog and setting in a setter, by successful selection. They know in their blood that it is no use working for wages, even high wages if you want to get on and be rich. There is nothing, there can be nothing but a bare living in any possible wage-scale—no interest, no capital, no compound progress. They don't say this; it's too obvious to them; they live it. They are wise as only an old race can be wise—to the game. They see from the moment they open their puppy eyes, that it is absurd to labor to produce wealth. The thing to do is to I watch and wait till the wealth is produced and then somehow, to get it from the producers. And they know how to do this as an animal knows the animal business and a plant knows the vegetable business—by instinct. So they, will practise medicine, law—any profession which like a business, gets a variable share of the finished final, coined form of the commonwealth after the common people have made it. But to go out and by the sweat of the brow to dig up and manufacture the raw stuffs of the earth into marketable commodities—no. The old peoples hate to do that and, as for your Armenians they simply won't."

He rested, watching me and, seeing that I wasn't watching him, he slipped me some more of his propaganda. "The Armenians," he said, "are the most intelligent, the most perfectly selected, the most highly developed race in the world— from the civilized point of view."

"The Jews," I echoed. "You spoke of them before, and I was gratified. It showed that you were getting inkling of what I was trying to say about old races. The Jews are the most familiar example to an untraveled person of an old, shrewd, intelligent people, and, yes, they are instinctive exploiters. They drive at second-hand wealth. But they will work. They hate to, but they can be made to work. And worse still, they are creative, inventive, sentimental. There are artists, philosophers, prophets among them still. They are imperfect. They are an unfinished product of civilization, about half-done. I understand why they are feared and hated; they have some of the mental superiority of race-age. But, to mention Jews in the same breath with the old peoples I am talking about is absurd. Why my old races drove or traded your Jews out of their own country. They can't live on the Arabs, Syrians, Egyptians. They do well in England, they get rich in France and Germany, and, of course, in the United States, they—yes, yes. But the Chinese, for example, the Chinese absorb Jews as a whale does little fishes; our own Scotch skin them alive; so do the Arabs, Turks, Greeks and, as for the Armenians—

"Jews," he said, taking breath, "the Jews themselves feel about Armenians the way the anti-Semitic Europeans feel about the Jews; and so do the Greeks, Turks—all the other races that have ever had them on them. They feel that the Armenians would put them all to work. And they would. The

Armenians are all that the Jews are, plus all that all the other races are—and they are Christians besides!"

He halted not for words, I take it— an educated Englishman has plenty of English. It was more as if he were balking at the conclusion which he preferred to have me jump at rather than to have it to quote from him. And when I didn't jump, he went on, dully, to give me another chance.

"The Armenians," he said, "must not have Armenia, not the back lands. They would not work them themselves, not even for themselves. They would not even do the work of organizing the work or development. They would let them out as concessions to others to manage. They want to live on the coast, in cities, on rent, interest, dividends and the profits of trading in the shares and the actual money earned by capital and labor."

"There are lots of people like that," I said. "The Armenians aren't the only ones."

"I see you still do not grasp my point," he said. "There are indeed others who would like to do that. The French bourgeoisie is moving in that direction, and our own English are coming to it, especially our Little Englanders of the so-called upper-class. They have that as their ideal. They would like to do nothing, but they can't. They are harmless. They are willing to do nothing but spend. But they do spend, you see. Even your Jews are spenders, great spenders. But your Armenians will do nothing and they won't spend. They get and they save; they sell but only to buy again and so get more and more. It takes evolution to develop such perfection of the true commercial spirit, and is a matter of degree. And the Armenians are the nth degree. I tell you that if ever the Armenians are given a fair start in the world, if they get a free hold of any corner of the earth, they will own the whole planet and work all the rest of mankind. That's what the Turks know and dread and the Greeks and—all of us who know them. And so—"

He was drawing upon me for his conclusion again—I didn't want to say it. And so I urged him on.

"And so—" I said.

"And so," he sidestepped, as we Americans say crudely, "and so we must divide them up, Armenia to one mandatory, the Armenians to another."

"And so," I sparred, "you are for Armenia for some ally, some partner of the British capitalist and the Armenians for us Americans. All right. Two questions occur: What can your ally do in Armenia without labor? And what in the world can we Americans do with the Armenians without Armenia?"

"Oh," he said, "there are other peoples in the Balkans, Asia Minor, India and Africa—backward nations, really backward, nations that would labor. These can be brought to Armenia and put to work. There is no lack of labor."

"So that solves the British, the practical problem," I said. "Now for the idealistic, the American problem. What are we to do with the Armenians?"

He would not say. His British humor or his diplomatic caution, or—something wouldn't let him. He shied off upon the danger to Asiatic labor and European capital of having the Armenians anywhere near where the mines and land were being worked.

"And so," I said, not without some (American) humor. "And so —"

A shadow crossed his eyes, but not his voice. He spoke sunnily again of "American idealism." I was tired of hearing it awfully bored, but he liked to talk about it. And this time he changed the key of the song a little. He called us young said we were inexperienced as yet in the management of other, older race and, therefore no doubt, prone to judge harshly the colonial conduct of the British and other practical rulers whose most conscientious agent sometime found it necessary to kill and otherwise put the fear of God into the minority of a subject people in the common interests of the majority and the security of invested capital.

"You don't realize," he-concluded, "how difficult and delicate a task it is to govern a strange, a foreign people."



Map presented by Lawrence to the Eastern Committee of the War Cabinet in November 1918

"You're wrong," I said, exasperated and I repeated my charge that he didn't know us. "You are as ill-informed about my people," I declared, "as you say we are about the Europeans, Turks, Armenians and the rest." I cited the Philippines, Cuba, the Sandwich Islands—all foreign countries which we were governing successfully. And I reminded him that we had all sort of foreigners in our very midst. The United States was not called the melting pot without reason. We had all sorts of foreigners there. We made even his Armenians labor. We did our hard job, I asserted, as well as any government on the face of the earth, no excepting the British, and to convince him that we were practical I related what I had seen done to foreign labor in New England, down South, out West and all over. But I happened to mention also our own natives, the American Indians.

He fairly leaped at that. "That's it," he cried. "That's what I have had in mind all along. Your policy with your Indians is the one for Armenians."

I was taken aback, astonished. I asked him what he thought our Indian policy had been and he said he understood that we had killed them all off—all; had we not?"

I looked him over the way he had me several times. I enjoyed doing it, too.

"And so," I said after a long pause, "you think that that is what we ought come over here and to the Armenians— kill 'em all off."

"No, no, no," he corrected. "How you pressman do misunderstand and misquote."

He didn't mean at all to say that we should adopt massacre as a policy. He knew we would not,

could not do that.

Well then, what did he mean? What should we do? He would not say. He wheeled round and round like a couple of whirling dervishes; it was wearisome. ?? But I got it at least. I had to say it myself, but it was right—I think. He didn't correct me.

He definitely and distinctly did not mean that we should set out consciously and deliberately to wipe out the Armenians. Not at all. He merely trusted or believed that after trying everything else we would end by doing That; and doing it well, too; leaving no Adam and Eve to go on raising Cain—

"But wouldn't that be a scandal?" I asked.

He thought not. He reminded me that we were so idealistic and enjoyed such repute for philanthropy that we seemed to be able to do anything within reason without losing either our idealism or our good name.

"There was no scandal, was there, over your Indian policy?" he asked. "And you never ceased to think that what you did was right? You have conquered part of Mexico, you have occupied Hawaii, taken the Philippines and Puerto Rico by force of arms from Spain; freed Cuba and kept a mortgage on it; you have bought the Danish Islands; and you have put your Marines ashore, in central America and forgotten them. You will soon be forced to restore order in the rest of Mexico. And yet," he said, with admiration, I thought, "you are still for self-determination for small nations. You are a small empire, and you have warned us in your Monroe Doctrine that you are going when you get ready to be a great empire. And yet you are anti-imperialists. You have just fought war against German Imperialism, and—"

"So did you," I shot in.

"Oh that is different," he fired back. "We are Imperialists. We frankly call ourselves an Empire and we fought honestly, for our Empire against the German's Empire. But you—you fought against empire for—self-determination."

There was a point there, and he waited maliciously, I felt, for me to meet it. And when I didn't—I couldn't right off in second like that—when I didn't answer, he went on

"I believe that you Americans can do whatever and not be doubted either by the world or by yourselves. There is something great, very great about that, something useful to the world. It suggests that you Americans could, and you surely would, do in Armenia proper that which has to be done there, with thoroughness; gradually, but completely, without missing a single or, rather, a married Armenian, and all without a scandal, without disturbing in the least your belief that you are—How shall I say?—well, not like us English or the French, Germans, Turks and I am afraid, not a bit like the Armenians."

"And," he hastened to add, "somebody has to solve the Armenian problem. It seems to me to be

poetic justice, good politics and sounds business to let the most idealistic people in the world take over the most practical people in the world."

What was he giving me? Was this British humor? I looked at him, hard. He didn't blink. He had that puffed-up appearance I had noticed before—but, no—not a twitch. It's a strain to interview an Englishman, and a risk. I remembered that he would repudiate the interview if there were the slightest "come-back." I decided to put him to the test right away.

"As I understand it," I said, "we Americans are a commercial culture, as the Armenians, as all these old nations were that ought to be killed off." He nodded. "They thought they were developing business when they were really developing a certain variety of the human species—a race of business men dependent upon the productive labor of other people whom they do not now govern and who hate them because they can beat anybody at trade and live without working—liars, profiteers, parasites—the most practical brains with the most Christian ideals and manners."

"You Americans talk well," he said. "No Englishman could be found to state anything like that as clearly as that."

"If now we Americans could, in our present, the early state of the development of this sort of man—if we could, by governing the Armenians, see close up the practical workings of our culture; if we could understand that what we were looking at and dealing with in the Armenian of today is the American of the future—"

"Of tomorrow," he corrected.

"Then," I went on, "we might, fail with the Armenians, we might in exasperation, kill them all—"

"Hear, hear."

"We might kill all Armenians, but, we would go home—"

"Cable," he suggested, "it's quicker."

"Cable home," I accepted tentatively, "cable a warning to lookout: 'Look out for the crossing practical business with Christian idealism.' Too much business and too much idealism might injure both these good things and us also, as a people."

"Hear, hear!" he exclaimed.

"It might make of great, rich America an Armenia which the British and the Russians (of the future) would find it 'necessary' to take over as a mandatory divided into two parts: one, the United States proper for England; the other, the people themselves, for Russia."

He was silent. I waited to see whether he had any sense of American humor. He waited, too, for a while and then, seeing; that I expected something, he spoke.

"Your idea—" he began.

"My idea!" I exploded.

"Yes," he said. "That's an idea. It's a good idea, good in theory, but— it's characteristically idealistic. I am considering it practically. Do you believe really that any American governors of the Armenians would be conscious enough to see their likeness to the Americans?"

"Yes English do," I retorted cuttingly.

"True," he agreed thoughtfully. "We see the meaning of the Armenians to the Americans, we Imperial British do. But I doubt, I am wondering whether our Little Englanders could be brought to foresee their fate in the fate of the old nations they govern."

I was beaten, helpless, flabbergasted. Fortunately he didn't see that. His eyes were down. He rose, but he was thinking deeply, as he led me to the door. There he looked up.

"Good-bye," he said, "I like your theory. I am afraid it won't work out in practice, but write it. It's suggestive. Write it carefully; not too clearly, and, by the way, don't quote me. I have said nothing, nothing."

** Lincoln Steffens' birthplace was San Francisco. He received his education in California and at various continental universities. He is veteran newspaperman, magazine editor, and contributor. Mr. Steffens has achieved fame as an interviewer and an author. At present his "Autobiography" is being widely read. Interview From 1919, "Outlook & Independent" Oct 14, 1931*

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