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CANNING AND SPANISH AMERICA

BY COLONEL E. M. LLOYD, R.E.

Read December 17, 1903

IN a letter to Hookham Frere, on January 8, 1825, Canning spoke of the recognition of Mexico and Colombia as 'an act which will make a change in the face of the world almost as great as that of the discovery of the continent now set free. The Allies will fret; but they will venture no serious remonstrance. France will fidget; but it will be with a view of hastening after our example. The Yankees will shout in triumph; but it is they who lose most by our decision.

'The great danger of the time—a danger which the policy of the European system would have fostered—was a division of the world into European and American, Republican and Monarchical; a league of worn-out governments on the one hand, and of youthful and stirring nations, with the United States at their head, in the other. *We* slip in between, and plant ourselves in Mexico. The United States have gotten the start of us in vain; and we link once more America to Europe.'¹

Stapleton, Canning's secretary and biographer, speaks of the recognition as perhaps the most important measure adopted while Canning was Foreign Minister.² The steps by which it was brought about well deserve study, and illustrate the merits and demerits of orators as statesmen.

¹ Festing, *J. H. Frere and his Friends*, p. 267.

² *Political Life of Canning*, ii. 1.

Canning had been a personal friend of Queen Caroline, and it was on account of the difficulties in connexion with her that he had left office at the end of 1820. In doing so he had assured Lord Liverpool and his colleagues that it was a deep mortification to him 'that one unfortunate question should, from circumstances over which he has no control, prevent him at a moment like the present from continuing to take his full share in upholding, in conjunction with them, those general principles of policy, internal and external, upon which they have been acting cordially together.' Castlereagh in his reply referred to 'the unanimity of sentiment which has prevailed in the Cabinet upon our general policy, internal and external,' and spoke of himself as 'the individual member of the Government who must feel your loss the most seriously, both in the House of Commons and in the business of the Foreign Office.'¹

On Castlereagh's death (August 1822) Canning was regarded, especially by Lord Liverpool, as the only man who could succeed him as leader of the House of Commons. It was doubtful whether he would accept any other office than that of Foreign Secretary; and besides, as Wellington put it, 'nothing can be so erroneous as to place any individual of great activity and talents in a situation in which there is no scope for his activity, and in which he must feel that his talents are thrown away.'² It was decided, therefore, to offer Canning the full succession; and in overcoming the king's personal objections Wellington declared his conviction that Canning's principles and opinions 'are in all the main points of your Majesty's policy, domestic as well as foreign, the same as those of your other servants.'³

Nevertheless there was a widespread feeling that the change meant a new departure. Two members of the Cabinet, Eldon and Sidmouth, had been strongly opposed to it. Castlereagh's brother resigned the embassy at Vienna. John Quincy Adams, then Secretary of State at Washington,

¹ Stapleton, *George Canning and his Times*, pp. 316, 319.

² *Wellington Despatches*, Third Series, i. 277.

³ *Ibid.* p. 274.

questioned Stratford Canning about his cousin's personal disposition 'with an evident leaning to the idea that George Canning's accession to office is likely to introduce a more liberal and vigorous system into the Cabinet.'¹

Canning was in favour of the Catholic claims, but so was Castlereagh; Castlereagh was against Parliamentary Reform, but so was Canning. The difference between them was not one of principles but of character. Castlereagh was a bad speaker, but a man of sound judgment, cool and courageous, who combined suavity with strength. He had spent his life in fighting Revolution, and he had learnt to place a high value on Continental alliances, especially that of Austria, not only in dealing with Napoleòn, the embodiment of the Revolution, but also in dealing with the Czar. In the seven years that followed Waterloo, British tendencies and those of the Continental Powers drifted apart, and Castlereagh incurred unpopularity on both sides by his efforts to keep them together.

Canning was justly described by Sir James Mackintosh (his political opponent) as 'a man of fine and brilliant genius, of warm affections, of high and generous spirit;' but he looked at affairs with 'the excitable disposition of the poet and the orator,'² and he had the orator's craving for popular applause. As Gladstone said of Peel, he was 'very sensible of the sweetness of the cheers of opponents.' Among men of his own party he had won 'a character for intrigue and insincerity.'³ The high hopes of his earlier years had been blighted by his own mistakes, and he had been obliged to accept as his leader the man whom he had once tried to get rid of as an inefficient colleague. He was now past fifty, and his health was far from robust. A few weeks after his appointment as Foreign Secretary he wrote to a friend: 'Ten years have made a world of difference, and prepared a very different sort of world to bustle in than that which

¹ Poole, *Life of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe*, i. 310.

² Sir H. Bulwer, *Historical Characters*, p. 418.

³ Croker, *Diaries*, i. 267.

I should have found in 1812. For fame, it is a squeezed orange; but for public good there is something to do, and I will try—but it must be cautiously—to do it. You know my politics well enough to know what I mean when I say that for *Europe* I shall be desirous *now and then* to read England.’¹

What he meant was indicated in his speech to his Liverpool constituents on August 30, before he had been invited to rejoin the Ministry: ‘In the times in which we live there is (disguise it how we may) a struggle going on—in some countries an open, in some a tacit struggle—between the principles of monarchy and democracy. God be praised that in that struggle we have not any part to take. . . . England has only to maintain herself on the basis of her own solid and settled constitution, firm, unshaken—a spectator interested in the contest only by her sympathies; not a partisan on either side, but, for the sake of both, a model, and ultimately perhaps an umpire.’² So far as England was concerned, there was no longer need for leagues of governments against the Revolution. Things were ‘getting back to a wholesome state again. Every nation for itself, and God for us all.’³

‘He was a Briton, through and through; British in his feelings, British in his aims, British in all his policy and projects’: such was the impression he made on Rush, the American minister, who praised the candid and liberal spirit in which Castlereagh always regarded American affairs.⁴

A year after Canning took office he explained himself as follows to the British ambassador at Vienna (Sir Henry Wellesley): ‘The Austrian minister prides himself, you say, upon being the champion and protector of ancient institutions, and the sworn irreconcilable enemy of revolution. I flatter myself that I am no more a lover of revolution than Prince Metternich. I have certainly passed near thirty years in fighting for old institutions, in that House of Commons

¹ Stapleton, *George Canning and his Times*, p. 364.

² *Ibid.* p. 368.

³ *Ibid.* p. 370.

⁴ Rush, *The Court of London from 1819 to 1825*, p. 358.

which Prince Metternich views with so much jealousy ; but in which and *by* which, after all, revolution has been arrested, and what remains of old institutions has been saved. But I cannot shut my eyes to the real state of things. I cannot forget, nor should Prince Metternich, that in resisting the French Revolution in all its stages, from the Convention to Buonaparte, we resisted the spirit of *change* to be sure, but we resisted also the spirit of *foreign domination*. So long as these two spirits were leagued, the resistance to one animated that to the other. But separate them, or (still more) array them against each other, and the most strenuous and most consistent anti-revolutionist may well hesitate which part to choose.' ¹

He showed that this was no new attitude for an English statesman. He referred to Castlereagh's declarations in 1820, in the confidential memorandum respecting Spain, and in the reply to the Troppau circular. Both of these were protests against the collective interference of the Powers in the affairs of other States. But in reply to Metternich's warning that England was losing her influence in Europe by separating herself from the Continental powers, he asked what had that influence effected at Laybach or Verona. 'No—our influence, *if* it is to be maintained abroad, must be secure in the sources of our strength at home ; and the sources of that strength are in the sympathy between the people and the government ; in the union of public sentiment with the public counsels ; in the reciprocal confidence and co-operation of the House of Commons and the Crown.' ²

In a similar strain he had told his constituents at Liverpool in 1816, in reply to the charge that he was a political adventurer : 'If to depend directly upon the people, as their representative in Parliament ; if, as a servant of the Crown, to lean on no other support than that of public confidence—if that be to be an adventurer, I plead guilty to the charge.' ³

One of the questions which interested the people of

¹ Stapleton, *George Canning and his Times*, p. 380.

² *Ibid.* pp. 375, 378.

³ Martineau, *History of the Peace*, i. 437.

England, especially a commercial community like Liverpool, was the emancipation of South America. The revolt of the Spanish colonies had opened the door to British trade at a time when Napoleon was doing his best to close all other doors to it. Extravagant hopes were entertained of the possible development of this trade when those countries should become peaceful and independent States. The contest had lasted twelve years, and might be prolonged, but its issue was hardly doubtful. Buenos Ayres, Chili, Mexico, Venezuela, and New Granada were practically free. The two latter had united to form the republic of Colombia, to which the province of Quito had been added in May 1822. It was only in Peru that the war continued with alternate success. In the work of liberation British soldiers and sailors had played an important part. Various corps, numbering altogether some 5,000 men, had been recruited in England and Ireland, largely from Wellington's old soldiers, and had helped Bolivar to victory at Carabobo and elsewhere. Lord Cochrane had formed a Chilian navy, and driven the Spaniards off the Pacific coast. Loans of many millions sterling had been raised, chiefly in the London market, to provide the sinews of war.

The absolutist tendencies of Ferdinand quickened British sympathies for the revolted colonies, and the discord between the king and the Spanish Liberals paralysed the efforts of the mother country to restore her authority. Such restoration, followed as it was likely to be by some return to the old trade restrictions, would be even worse for British commerce than the continuance of the existing anarchy in South America.

The cry for Parliamentary reform always grew louder in England in proportion as trade grew slack and taxation pressed heavily. A government which was opposed to reform had special inducements, therefore, to open fresh markets or hinder the closing of them. In 1790 Pitt had told Miranda that the emancipation of Spanish America was a matter which 'would infallibly engage the attention of every minister of this country.'¹ In 1810 Canning had replied

¹ Martineau, i. 127.

to those who spoke of Talavera as a barren victory that it would hereafter open to us the ports of Spanish America.¹

The United States had shown themselves friendly throughout to the colonies which were following their own example, and the independence of the new States had been formally recognised by Congress on May 4, 1822. 'So, Mr. Adams, you are going to make honest people of them?' said the British minister, Stratford Canning. 'Yes, sir,' Adams replied; 'we proposed to your government to join us some time ago, but they would not, and now we shall see whether you will be content to *follow* us.'² This step caused much anxiety in England, lest the new States should discriminate by concessions or import duties between the countries which had recognised them and those which had not.

Castlereagh was to have represented Great Britain at the Congress of Vienna (or Verona, as it afterwards became) in 1822. He had drafted instructions for his own guidance which had been approved by the Cabinet. On his death, Wellington was sent as British representative, and was to be guided by these instructions. Canning supplemented them as regards the Eastern question, but not as regards the affairs of Spain or Spanish America.

In the case of Spain, rigid abstinence from any interference in her internal affairs formed the basis of British policy, coupled with solicitude for the safety of the royal family, and observance of our engagements with Portugal. In the case of the Spanish colonies in revolt, it was laid down that where the contest still subsisted there was no justifiable ground for recognition. But in the larger number of provinces the struggle might be said to be over, the local governments had complete possession, and there was already a *de facto* recognition of them. The question was—how long should the *de facto* system of recognition be maintained, to the exclusion of a more formal recognition by diplomatic agents, not amounting to a recognition *de jure*?

¹ Stapleton, *George Canning and his Times*, p. 185.

² Poole, *Life of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe*, i. 310.

Wellington was to discuss this question with the allied Courts. He was to 'recall to their attention the intercourse which for a long period of years has subsisted between Great Britain and the provinces so circumstanced, and the impossibility of its now being obstructed or checked without the certainty of rousing the utmost spirit of discontent in the commercial world; that the British Parliament in its last session has found it necessary to give to that intercourse a character of reciprocity, and to relax in its favour the former principle of our Navigation Act, viz. the exclusion of the produce of South America except in British ships.' He was to endeavour, as far as possible, to bring the Allied cabinets to the adoption of common sentiments, but to take care to leave the British Government an independent discretion to act according to circumstances.¹

In November Wellington circulated a note drawn up in accordance with these instructions. He mentioned in it (at Canning's suggestion) that the relaxation of the authority of Spain in America had let loose a multitude of pirates and buccaneers which disturbed British trade and insulted the British flag. As redress could not be obtained from Spain, the British Government was driven to undertake the task; 'but it is impossible to expect that this intolerable evil should be thoroughly extirpated without the co-operation of the local authorities occupying the ports and coasts of that part of the continent of America. The necessity of this co-operation must lead to some further recognition of the existence *de facto* of some one or more of these self-erected governments.'² The question, however, received little attention at the Congress, and no agreement was arrived at.

In the following session of Parliament, Canning was congratulated by the members of the Opposition on the British attitude at Verona, but he very properly disclaimed any special credit for it. 'He was compelled in mere justice to say that upon his entering into the office which he had the honour to fill, he found the principles on which the govern-

¹ *Wellington Despatches*, i. 287.

² *Ibid.* p. 386.

ment was acting reduced to writing ; and this State paper formed what he might be allowed to call the political creed of the ministers.'¹

Nevertheless the question of Spanish America was one into which he threw himself with ardour. He wrote to Wellington on October 29 : ' Is it possible to stop the progress of events and to soothe the growing impatience of our whole mercantile and manufacturing interests—standing still and doing nothing ? ' And again on November 8 : ' Every day convinces me more and more that in the present state of the world, in the present state of the Peninsula, and in the present state of this country, the American questions are out of all proportion more important to us than the European, and that if we do not seize and turn them to our advantage in time, we shall rue the loss of an opportunity, never, never to be recovered.'²

Wellington, on the other hand, was altogether in favour of delay. ' I know,' he said (October 18), ' that we must at last recognise all these governments, but I would recognise them when necessary, and only when really constituted and become powers ; instead of seeking for reasons for recognising them, and by recognising them, constitute them.' Again (November 10) : ' I have always been for going as far as was necessary and never further, and for justifying to Spain and the Allies each particular case. By so doing, we shall stand as we ought to do in the eyes of the world. If we go further, we shall lose our character for justice and forbearance, which after all is what constitutes our power.'

He found reasons for such forbearance in our connexion with Spain and with the Colonies, and in the assistance which British subjects had given to the latter. He added : ' I confess that I should be ashamed of showing my face even upon the present occasion, if the piracy did not give me something to say besides the argument of commercial advantage and the clamours of our people.'³

¹ Stapleton, *Political Life of Canning*, i. 299.

² *Wellington Despatches*, i. 466 and 511.

³ *Ibid.* i. 385 and 516.

He had always differed from his colleagues about the Spanish colonies in America. He thought that measures should have been taken earlier to prevent the interference of British subjects in the war, and disapproved every step towards recognition. He wrote to Metternich (May 4, 1824): 'I am one of those who think that it will be very little difference to this country in what way the disputes between the Colonies and the Mother Country are terminated, provided foreign powers do not interfere: but that is not the general opinion in this country.'¹

To protect British trade, consuls were sent to the several provinces. Fresh remonstrances and warnings were addressed to Madrid, respecting piracy in the West Indies and the unjust condemnation of British vessels by Spanish courts for trading with the revolted colonies. Orders were given to our naval officers in those seas to make reprisals. The Spanish Government promised full redress, but it was in no position to make it. It had enough to attend to at home

Wellington had failed both at Verona and at Paris to persuade the Continental powers to adopt a policy of non-intervention in Spain. In April 1823 a French army, the instrument of the Holy Alliance, invaded Spain to liberate the king from the control of the Constitutional party. By the end of September Cadiz was taken, Ferdinand was set free, and at once proceeded to crush the Constitutionals. Canning was very indignant at the invasion, and was disposed to back up his remonstrances by demonstrations, which he was afterwards assured by the French premier, Villèle, would have sufficed to prevent it;² but he was overruled by the Cabinet.

Villèle was personally against invasion. He was much more concerned about Spanish America, and he wished to obtain influence rather than domination in Spain, to further French commercial interests. He feared that war would play into the hands of England. He had even offered, in

¹ *Wellington Despatches*, ii. 388 and 260.

² Stapleton, *George Canning and his Times*, p. 551.

1822, to convey Spanish troops to the Spanish colonies.¹ This led Canning to intimate to the French Government when the French army was about to cross the Spanish frontier, that, 'disclaiming in the most solemn manner any intention of appropriating to himself the smallest portion of the late Spanish possessions in America, His Majesty is satisfied that no attempt will be made by France to bring under her dominion any of those possessions, either by conquest or by cession from Spain.'²

No answer was returned to this despatch, and before long there were rumours that France meant to help Ferdinand to recover his colonies, and was to be indemnified in America for the expenses she had incurred in Spain. There was no difference of opinion among our ministers as to British action in such a contingency. In a cabinet memorandum, written before the French invasion, Lord Liverpool had advocated neutrality, but had pointed out that the case would be altered if France should attempt to lend Spain aid in America. 'Here a maritime war would be to the purpose, and I should have no difficulty in deciding that we ought to prevent, by every means in our power, perhaps Spain from sending a single Spanish regiment to South America, after the supposed termination of the war in Spain, but certainly France from affording to Spain any aid or assistance for that purpose.'³

Wellington, while disbelieving that France entertained any intention of interfering in the Spanish-American concerns, was quite prepared to veto such interference. He thought, however, that 'it would be far more conciliatory and more effectual for every purpose, excepting to gratify those who wish to push us to a quarrel, to communicate verbally either with M. de Polignac [the French ambassador] or with the ministers at Paris, and if there be real ground for uneasiness, explain it to them and call for an explanation of their conduct.'⁴ Canning adopted this course, and had a

¹ *Wellington Despatches*, i. 640.

² Stapleton, *Political Life of Canning*, ii. 19.

³ Yonge's *Liverpool*, ii. 232-3.

⁴ *Wellington Despatches*, ii. 135.

conversation with Polignac on October 9, in which he told him that the British Government could not see any part of the Spanish colonies transferred to any other power with indifference, and that it would consider any foreign interference, by force or by menace, in the dispute between Spain and the colonies, as a motive for recognising the latter without delay. Polignac replied that his government regarded the reduction of Spanish America as utterly hopeless, and had no intention or desire to appropriate any part of it.¹

Some time before this (on August 20) Canning had proposed to Rush, the United States minister, a joint declaration by Great Britain and the United States, that they did not aim at the possession of any portion of the Spanish colonies themselves and could not see any part of them transferred to any other power with indifference. Rush reported this overture to Washington, but offered to take the responsibility of agreeing to it if Great Britain would recognise the Spanish-American States. That was more than Canning could promise, and the matter dropped.²

At Washington it was decided that (in J. Q. Adams's words) 'it would be more candid, as well as more dignified, to avow our principles explicitly to Russia and France, than to come in as a cockboat in the wake of the British man-of-war.' The avowal was made in the President's message to Congress on December 2, which developed what has since been known as the Monroe doctrine. 'With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power, we have not interfered and shall not interfere. But with the governments who have declared their independence and maintained it, and whose independence we have on great consideration and on 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

¹ Stapleton, *Political Life of Canning*, ii. 26.

² Rush, *The Court of London from 1819 to 1825*, p. 376.

disposition towards the United States.' So ran the part of the message which had reference to this particular question.¹

The declaration was hailed by Brougham as decisive for South American independence. And Canning himself wrote (December 31): 'They have aided us materially. The Congress was broken in all its limbs before, but the President's speech gives it the *coup de grâce*.'² But taking the Monroe doctrine as a whole, it does not seem that Mr. Bayard was warranted in speaking of it (in 1887) as announced at the instance and with the moral support and approval of the British Government.

The fact is, there was too much rivalry between the two governments for cordial co-operation. Take, for instance, the question of Cuba. While Wellington was at Verona, Canning wrote to him (November 8, 1822): 'I hope I may not have to tell you, before your return, that the Yankees have occupied Cuba; a blow which I do not know how we can prevent, but which as a government I hardly know how we should survive, if we do nothing to compensate it to ourselves.' Wellington's reply was: 'In general I should say that the American example is one to be avoided rather than followed; and I am not certain that I would not prefer to forbid them to take Cuba than to follow their example by taking Puerto Rico.'³

The question continued to weigh on Canning's mind, and in May 1824 he went so far as to offer to enter into a formal engagement with Spain that the British navy should defend Cuba against any *external* aggression, if Spain would recognise the independence of the revolted colonies.⁴ Happily the offer was declined. In February 1825 Polignac reported to his government that Canning was said to have been trying to buy Cuba, and would rather see France acquire it than the United States.⁵

¹ Foster, *A Century of American Diplomacy*, p. 442-450. Cf. Mr. W. C. Ford's articles on J. Q. Adams and the Monroe doctrine, in the *American Historical Review*, July and October 1902.

² Stapleton, *George Canning and his Times*, p. 395.

³ *Wellington Despatches*, i. 511, 545.

⁴ Stapleton, *Political Life of Canning*, ii. 55. ⁵ Villèle *Mémoires*, v. 160.

There was no less jealousy at Washington lest France or England should get possession of the island. The American minister at Madrid was told (April 28, 1823) to let it be known 'that we should consider an attempt to transfer the island, against the will of its inhabitants, as subversive of their rights, no less than of our interests.' Rush represented Canning's overture as prompted wholly by British interests: 'It is France that must not be aggrandised, not South America that must be made free.' Adams wrote: 'The object of Canning appears to have been to obtain some public pledge from the Government of the United States, ostensibly against the forcible interference of the Holy Alliance between Spain and South America, but really or especially against the acquisition to the United States themselves of any part of the Spanish-American possessions.'¹

The Congress to which Canning referred in the letter above quoted as 'broken in all its limbs' was to be held at Paris, 'to aid Spain in adjusting the affairs of the revolted colonies in America.' It was meant to restrain England from recognition, and perhaps to secure a European mandate for French intervention. The proposal was put forward by the King of Spain, but it originated with Russia. The British Government declined to take part in it, and practically nothing came of it. Wellington told the Russian ambassador frankly 'that we were the only power which had any influence in this question, and that they had no right to call upon us to go into a conference to decide in what manner that influence should be exerted, when it was well known that over the decisions of that conference we should have no influence whatever.'²

In acquainting the Spanish minister with the decision of the British Government on this point, Canning had informed him (in January 1824) that it had no wish to anticipate Spain in the recognition of the South American States, and would

¹ W. C. Ford, 'John Quincy Adams and the Monroe Doctrine,' *American Historical Review*, vii. 680.

² *Wellington Despatches*, ii. 190.

willingly aid Spain in a negotiation on the basis of independence; but that before many months 'considerations regarding not only the essential interests of His Majesty's subjects, but the relations of the Old World with the New,' might forbid any further postponement in the case of those States which had established *de facto* their political existence. In March papers were presented to Parliament which made all the world acquainted with this notification, and also with Canning's conversation with Polignac in the previous October. This, as Canning afterwards remarked, 'sealed the fate of the question.'¹

The Spanish ministers sought to gain time by assurances that British interests were in no danger; but the considerations to which Canning had pointed hastened matters. In July he proposed that recognition should be given to Buenos Ayres and Colombia by negotiating commercial treaties with them. Wellington and other members of the Cabinet opposed this step, and urged that while Bolivar with the Colombian army was fighting in Peru, and the result was doubtful, Colombia itself could not be regarded as securely established. It was decided, therefore, to wait for the reports of commissioners who had been sent to Mexico and Colombia, and to recognise at present only Buenos Ayres, which had a settled government, and had long been free from Spanish troops. Full powers were sent to the British consul to negotiate a treaty, but the step was kept secret. At this very time in fact Villèle was writing to Polignac that in the actual state of the Spanish colonies recognition would bring discredit without benefit, and that the English Government was too enlightened to do such a thing.²

The victory of Ayacucho (December 9, 1824) decided the fate of Peru, and practically ended the War of Independence. But before the news of it reached England further steps towards recognition had been taken. In a 'memorandum

¹ Stapleton, *George Canning and his Times*, p. 403.

² Villèle, *Mémoires*, v. 92.

on our relations with the Spanish American Provinces,'¹ circulated among the Cabinet at the end of November, it was pointed out that these States could, if they chose, force recognition by putting high duties on imports from non-recognising powers. If this were done, the result would be to throw the wealth, power, and influence of those countries into the hands of the people of the United States. It would be better, therefore, to recognise them before it became evident that we were doing it under compulsion.

Wellington still maintained that 'in a view to our own internal situation,'² to our relations with foreign powers, to our former and to our existing relations with Spain, considering the mode in which the contests with these States had been carried on, and to our own honour and good name, the longer the establishment of such relations is delayed the better.'³ But after long discussions it was decided that commercial treaties should be negotiated with Mexico and Colombia as had been done with Buenos Ayres.

The king reluctantly assented (December 17), and in doing so he said: 'The king wishes that these measures should stand on the ground of the interests of his subjects, and not as measures of war or retaliation against other powers; and that they should not be put forth to the world as having any other objects in view than those which the king has stated as his motive for assenting to them.'⁴ In submitting the matter to him Canning had laid great stress on the *indefinite* military occupation of Cadiz and other Spanish fortresses by France. Spain, he argued, could no longer be considered as a free agent; her foreign policy was

¹ This is attributed to Lord Liverpool in Yonge's life of him (ii. 297), and also in Canning's letter to the king (*George Canning*, p. 407); but Canning's note of November 30 to Wellington implies that he was himself the writer (*Wellington Despatches*, ii. 354).

² He wrote to Peel (December 30): 'We are going to bring the rebel Bolivar and the rebel State of Colombia into diplomatic relations with His Majesty at the very moment in which we prosecute Mr. O'Connell for holding them up as an example to the people of Ireland' (*Ibid.* p. 385).

³ *Ibid.* p. 364.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 368.

essentially French; and it became the duty of the British Government to prevent Spanish America from being brought within the same subjection.¹

A week before, he had told Lord Granville, the ambassador at Paris, to ask the French ministers for a positive disavowal of any design of retaining Cadiz, and for a fixed term for the evacuation of it and the other fortresses. Their answer was that the duration of the French occupation must depend on the will and pleasure of France and Spain.² Canning was in fact well aware of their wish to withdraw, but the state of Spain made it difficult to fix a date.

On December 17 Canning wrote again to Granville: 'The fight has been hard, but it is won. The deed is done. The nail is driven. Spanish America is free; and if we do not mismanage our matters sadly, she is English, and *'novus sæclorum nascitur ordo.'* . . . Now you will understand why I set you upon Damas and Villèle for the answer about Spain. You see the use that it has been turned to in the minute. It was no less useful in discussion. We—that is L[iverpool] and I—had made up our minds to be satisfied with Mexico. But your despatch enabled us to carry Colombia too. Now that it has done its work, I do not want to persecute Villèle with this question, nor to get any ill-humour into the discussion.'³

Lord Dalling has spoken of 'the adroit adaptations of means to ends, the clever profiting by times and occasions' which characterised Canning.⁴ This is an example of them. It certainly smacks also of the insincerity which Croker complained of.

On January 1, 1825, Canning informed the foreign ambassadors of the measures that had been taken, and they were announced to Parliament a month afterwards. There they met with general approval, the Opposition confining itself to criticism of the long delay in recognition, and the particular

¹ Stapleton, *George Canning and his Times*, p. 407-411.

² *Ibid.* p. 488.

³ *Ibid.* p. 412.

⁴ Bulwer, *Historical Characters*, p. 431.

method adopted. Russia, Austria, and Prussia expressed their deep regret at a step which 'gave a final blow to the interests of Spain in the New World, and tended to encourage the revolutionary spirit which it had been found so difficult to restrain in Europe,' but took no further action. Spain made a formal protest, and drew from Canning a long justification in which he brought forward abundant precedent for the recognition of *de facto* governments.¹

The commercial treaties were negotiated, and the envoys from Colombia and Buenos Ayres were received very graciously by George IV. before the end of the year. By that time the king had come to the conclusion that his fears of trouble with the Continental powers were groundless, and his dislike of Canning was changing into admiration and attachment. The minister did not disdain the aid of Lady Conyngham to win his way into the king's good graces.²

In the autumn of 1826 Canning went to Paris and had several conferences with Villèle. Some French troops were still in Spain, and though Villèle was eager to withdraw them, circumstances hindered him. New complications now arose. In Portugal British influence had been exerted more successfully than in Spain, and had brought about a peaceful separation between Portugal and Brazil. On the death of John VI., in March 1826, his son Pedro, Emperor of Brazil, succeeded him, but being unwilling to leave Brazil he renounced the Portuguese crown in favour of his daughter, after granting a constitution which was brought from Rio to Lisbon by the British minister, Sir Charles Stuart. The enemies of this constitution rallied round Pedro's brother, Miguel, and the support given to them by the Spanish government brought Spain and Portugal to the brink of war. Portuguese deserters were allowed to recross the frontier as armed corps to serve as a nucleus for insurrection.

Portugal appealed to England for the assistance which she was bound by treaty to furnish against external aggres-

¹ Stapleton, *Political Life of Canning*, ii. 79-92.

² Bulwer, *Historical Characters*, p. 449.

sion. On this point there was no difference of opinion in the British Cabinet. On December 11, 1826, Canning brought down to the House of Commons a message from the king, and next day 5,000 men were on the way to Lisbon.

In moving the address in reply to the king's message, Canning went back to the line of argument he had followed three years before, but with a significant change. At that time (April, 1823) he had given it as a strong reason why England should not assist Spain to repel the French invasion, that in such a war all the weapons of insurrection would inevitably come into play, and it was not for England, which had so long fought against Jacobins and Anarchists, to bring about this result. Her part was to hold the balance between conflicting principles. He now adverted once more to these consequences of a war of opinions, but this time it was to warn foreign nations that 'this country (however earnestly she may endeavour to avoid it) could not, in such case, avoid seeing ranked under her banners all the restless and dissatisfied of any nation with which she might come in conflict.'¹ It was a line of argument not much to the taste of his colleagues. Wellington's comment was: 'We pass in Europe for a Jacobin club. However, as yet we have only boasted that we are such a body. Our acts do not yet prove it.'²

In Parliament there was no opposition worth mentioning to the course which the government had decided on. But some speakers referred, by way of either praise or blame, to the neutrality which had been adopted when France invaded Spain. Canning seized the opportunity to vindicate his foreign policy. He owned that he had always regarded the French occupation of Spain as a disparagement and an affront to England. But 'whatever effect a war commenced upon the mere ground of the entry of a French army into Spain might have, it would probably not have had the effect of getting that army out again. . . . Was there no other mode

¹ Stapleton, *Political Life of Canning*, iii. 223.

² *Wellington Despatches*, iii. 500.

of resistance than by a direct attack upon France, or by a war to be undertaken on the soil of Spain?

‘What if the possession of Spain might be rendered harmless as regards us—and valueless to the possessors; might not compensation for disparagement be obtained, and the policy of our ancestors vindicated, by means better adapted to the present time? If France occupied Spain, was it necessary, in order to avoid the consequences of that occupation, that we should blockade Cadiz? No. I looked another way—I sought materials of compensation in another hemisphere. Contemplating Spain, such as our ancestors had known her, I resolved that if France had Spain, it should not be Spain *with the Indies*. I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old.’¹

Few phrases have been more often quoted, yet perhaps never was a phrase more hollow. Sir James Graham spoke of it as a proof of the excitement Canning had produced in his audience that they were ripe for such a boast.² It was not Canning who had called the new States into existence; it was they themselves. In recognising them we followed the example of the United States, and did so mainly for commercial reasons. Before the French invasion of Spain Canning was taking steps in that direction. The one great service we had rendered them was in saying ‘Hands off!’ to France; but here also the United States must share the credit, and it was in no special sense Canning’s work. His language went counter to the proviso which George IV. had attached to his assent to the commercial treaties, that they should not be put forth to the world as measures of retaliation. It implied also that Canning would view with equanimity a permanent occupation of Spain (without the Indies) by France, which was very far from being the case.

Canning knew that it had been intimated to the King of Spain that the French troops would be withdrawn in April, but he treated his knowledge as confidential. ‘Had I felt

¹ Stapleton, *Political Life of Canning*, iii. 227–234.

² T. Moore, *Diary*, p. 427.

myself authorised to affirm that the period of evacuation was fixed and certain, I should have had no need of any other defence,' he wrote to Granville (Dec. 14). In the absence of such authority, 'I was obliged to justify in the best manner I could . . . our tame acquiescence in the continuance of the French army in Spain.' He owned that, personally, he could not regret the extremity to which he was driven: 'for if I know anything of the House of Commons from thirty-three years' experience, or if I may trust to what reaches me in reports of feelings out of doors, the declaration of the obvious but unsuspected truth that "I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old," has been more grateful to English ears and to English feelings ten thousand times, than would have been the most satisfactory announcement of the intention of the French Government to withdraw its army from Spain.'¹

However grateful to English ears and conducive to his own popularity, Canning's vindication was not needed to justify the sending of troops to Portugal. That was a step which all parties at home approved, and which Damas, the French Foreign Minister, defended as a compliance with treaty obligations. The Villèle ministry had blamed the proceedings of Spain, and had recalled their ambassador Moustier, who had secretly encouraged those proceedings. It is true Villèle stood in need of support against the ultras, who had the ear of Charles X., but support was furnished by the vigorous action of Great Britain, and Canning's language proved rather an embarrassment, giving a handle to extremists.

Regarded as a mere rhetorical flourish to serve a momentary purpose, it would not be worth while to dwell upon it; but his letters already quoted show that his words represented a genuine conviction. Carried away by a lively imagination, he did not see facts in a dry light. He exaggerated the value of the work done, and his own share in the doing of it. As regards the former, the new American

¹ Stapleton, *George Canning and his Times*, p. 546.

States were a broken reed to lean upon, to redress the European balance. They had no sooner left off fighting the Spaniards than they began to fight among themselves. Their republican constitutions were superseded by military dictatorships, and their federations were dissolved.¹ Six years after our recognition of them the trade of Great Britain (imports and exports) with La Plata, Mexico, and Colombia was under three millions, only one fourth of her trade with the British West Indies, and one fortieth of her whole trade. Colombia and La Plata had ceased to pay any interest on their debt.

This by no means proves that our recognition of them was a mistake, but it was no great matter for triumph. Mr. Fyffe has remarked: 'There is indeed little doubt that the independence of the Spanish colonies would have been recognised by Great Britain soon after the war of 1823, whoever might have been our Minister for Foreign Affairs; but this recognition was a different matter in the hands of Canning from what it would have been in the hands of his predecessor. The contrast between the two men was one of spirit rather than of avowed rules of action. Where Castlereagh offered apologies to the Continental sovereigns, Canning uttered defiance.'²

The result of Canning's methods, alike in the Spanish and the Greek question, was to provoke sharp personal antagonism between him and Metternich. To the latter Canning was the 'scourge of the world,' a malevolent meteor hurled by Providence upon England and Europe.³ Canning in turn regarded Metternich as 'the greatest r—— and l—— on the Continent, perhaps in the civilised world.'⁴ These antipathies separated England from the ally with whom on the whole she had most interests in common, and served the purposes of Russia in her dealings with Turkey. Two of

¹ See chap. xi. of *The Colombian and Venezuelan Republics*, by W. L. Scruggs (1900).

² Fyffe, *Modern Europe*, p. 517. ³ Metternich's *Memoirs*, iv. 324 and 392.

⁴ Stapleton, *George Canning and his Times*, p. 427.

Canning's adherents—Palmerston and Stratford de Redcliffe—laboured hard in later life to recover some of the ground which he had enabled Russia to gain. At home, the stimulus which he gave to liberalism hastened the advent of Reform, to which he was always opposed, and the break-up of the party to which he had always belonged.

His wit, his eloquence, his high spirit, and his quick sympathy with public opinion made Canning a statesman of whom his countrymen are justly proud, but the qualities which make a successful leader of the House of Commons are not those which are most essential for a Minister of Foreign Affairs.

APPENDIX

The following extracts from unpublished letters throw light on the currents of opinion in England, and the mixture of motives in favour of the recognition of the Spanish-American States. They were written to a lady who was living at Bogotá, where she acted as agent for a London firm. She was the widow of an officer who had taken out a British legion to Venezuela in 1819 (see 'Wellington Despatches,' third series, vol. ii. pp. 116-126). The writers were Sir William Adams, a well-known oculist, who had thrown himself into American speculation, and Sir Robert Wilson, M.P. for Southwark, who was the ardent champion of liberty all over the world. He had gone to Spain in 1823, to help the Spaniards in resisting the French invasion.

Sir William Adams to Mrs. English

September 8, 1824—[In a previous letter] 'I recommended your advising the Executive securing to the Nation the produce of all Platina mines discovered in future (and an abundance may be found if looked after), as the Gold Mines found in Great Britain are secured to the Crown—instance, the Gold Mines of Wicklow. Among other reasons for this measure is the *certainty* that, in consequence of the enormous quantities of silver which will be imported into Europe when the Mexican and Peruvian mines are properly worked, that metal will cease to be a *precious metal*, and it is my opinion as

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well as that of very competent judges equally as my own that in twenty years hence the Governments of Europe will be obliged to alter their metallic currency, and consequently, if so, Platina *must be* the substitute.

‘I also requested you to secure the enclosed patents for tanning, which will be of immense importance to Columbia, as, from the quantities of Hides she produces, she will be enabled by tanning them herself to supply most of the other States. After securing the Patents I requested you to endeavour to sell them, and we would assign to you five per cent. of the net produce of the sale, but do not sell them without communicating first to us. I say *we* because I have a third part of the Patent, which I flatter myself will in no degree check the natural energy of your mind and exertions in effecting the most beneficial arrangement and sale. I will, as soon as I can, procure specimens and forward them to you, but in the interim it will be enough for you to guarantee that the article shall be *perfect*, that is, superior to anything ever seen in Columbia, and equal to the very best ever made in England, and vastly superior to that generally procured here at present. Within the last two months the Patent was sold in France for 40,000*l.*, after the leather had undergone the strictest scrutiny of Chaptal and the first Chemists and Tanners in Paris. The Patentees (one of whom is Perkins *my Partner*) expect 500,000*l.* for their Patent in England. I think that you ought to sell it for 120,000*l.* in Columbia. Get the Government to purchase it and grant Licences to Tanners, whereby they would vastly increase the Revenue and add to the general prosperity of the nation.

‘I also requested you to obtain a Patent for Perkins’s High Pressure Steam Engine and Rotatory Scull for propelling Steam-Boats *in all the waters and seas of Columbia*. He is my Partner and I purchased one third of his Patents. You will perceive, by the inclosed *Proofsheet* of remarks which I have hastily thrown together, the nature of this invention. His system of Engine-propelling means and boat building altogether constitute the most perfect system that the world has ever seen or the human mind can imagine. He has made contracts to build boats for the Ganges which will not draw above twelve or fourteen inches of water, therefore most peculiarly well adapted for the Columbian inland Rivers, especially the Magdalena. . . . I reserve the last part of this letter for a subject in which I am, as by Lady Adams’s letters you will find she also is, *most interested*, namely for you to exert your influence in inducing the Columbian Government to invest their loose money in Cockburn’s

and Peel's Bank. Sir Robert Peel, the father of the Minister, has established a Bank for the benefit of his grandchildren, to which belong the children of Dean Cockburn. His brothers, General Sir James C., Paymaster of Marines, and Admiral Sir George C., one of the Lords of the Admiralty, are acting Partners. It is called the "Government Bank" from the exertions made by the Government People to support it. Mr. Canning, out of compliment to his Colleague, the Minister Peel, keeps his money in this Bank. Now, they are all (especially the Cockburns) the warmest friends of South American Independence, and are particularly anxious to cultivate relations and connection with the new States. It is needless for me to point out the immense advantages to Columbia in having such a connection as their Patrons and friends, for the Peels have decidedly the greatest influence of any single family in England. The Minister is the personal friend of the Duke of York, and will be Prime Minister when the King dies. And moreover look at the respectability of drawing upon the *Government Bank* instead of a *Jew*, who is perfectly understood to be one both in heart and principle and who no doubt employs Columbian money at 4 per cent., and as he is a great Speculator in Foreign Loans (having the Columbian, Mexican, and Portuguese Loans, and having also been tampering with the Spaniards), if any Loan should go *very wrong* probably *all* his creditors "would get in for it." Now no such fears *could* for a moment be entertained in *Peel's Bank* (half a million being Sir Robert's portion), while for their own interests' sake they will as a matter of course do all in their power to promote the views and objects of Columbia in every shape and form, and if they could execute commissions for arms, clothing, &c., of course they would do so on receiving a commission for their trouble. . . .'

October 2, 1824. . . . 'I have written to you twice about Cockburn's House for you to try to get the money of the Loan deposited in their hands, as well as the supply of arms, stores, &c. The benefit to South American interests generally will be greatly benefitted (*sic*) by such a connection, for it is human nature that those who profit by the prosperity of any nation or set of nations will do all in their power to promote that prosperity. Now that the Peels and Cockburns have that power is as obvious as the noonday, as also that Jews and merchants do not possess it, while their principle is to get *all they can* out of their customers, and it is not considered *a sin* to make a *rich customer* pay *the highest price* for every article. Now in conversation with Sir James yesterday he declared that in any

supplies he might furnish he never would permit the inordinate profits to be put upon the articles which it was understood the new Governments have had hitherto to pay, and he said that he would feel himself conscientiously bound to procure the very best and most useful kinds of articles that this country could afford. Now this [is] the true patriotic spirit for the new States to deal with, and with what confidence and pleasure must they enter into correspondence with men who feel and act up to such principles ! As a proof of the sincerity of Sir James's disinterested friendship to South America (for he is *almost* as great a zealot in the cause as your humble servant) he hesitated exceedingly in acquiescing in the Platina because he thought that it would not be beneficial to Columbia to introduce anything new which might bring upon her either the jealousy or disapprobation of older States. But when I explained that it was to liberate the gold and silver for exportation and to be confined to Columbia, he immediately gave it his warmest approbation, declaring that no benefit to the House should ever induce him to recommend a measure hostile to the interests of the New World. This is the right and proper feeling to be entertained by Capitalists in this country towards the new States, who have it fully in their power most liberally to repay those who exercise these feelings towards them. . . .

'The inclosed speech of Lord Liverpool his Lordship read over and corrected in manuscript at my instance, while the Marquis of Lansdowne almost wrote his over entirely after the shorthand-writer had taken it in full. I was fully employed for a fortnight in obtaining data for his Lordship, giving him all my manuscript reports, &c. . . . We are most anxiously waiting for [news of] Bolivar. Upon his exertions depends the decision of Ministers to act immediately. Iturbide being dead, the expulsion of the Spaniards from Peru is all that is further required by the Chancellor and his party in the Cabinet to recognise the new States.'

February 15, 1826 [after announcing the failure of Mr. B. A. Goldsmidt]. 'You recollect, my dear Madam, what I wrote to you respecting Cockburn's Bank this time twelve months. Refer to my letters and see what I then anticipated as being possible to happen, and how much the Colombian Government have to regret not acting upon the suggestion. As may well be supposed, the consternation in the Foreign market is *extreme*. The Colombian 6 per cent. stock is at 36 or 38—Mexican at 42. It is furthermore stated that the whole of the Colombian money left for dividends, &c. was in Goldsmidt's hands, so that there will be nothing left to pay the half-yearly

dividends. Consols are at 73, and are expected to go down still lower. In fact such distress, misery, and confusion now existing in the City was scarcely ever before witnessed.'

Sir Robert Wilson to Mrs. English

June 5, 1824 . . . 'Columbia seems to be quite at peace, but I hope she will avoid the dangers of security. Whilst there is a Spanish or Portuguese flag on the Main, whilst Mexico is unsettled, whilst the Havannah and Porto Rico are *Inquisition* stations, she must keep armed. The recognition of Independence by England, and her subsequent treaties, will be determined very much by the power of Columbia to maintain it. Force, not weakness, is the bond of union between States. I am sure Canning is quite sincere in his wish to cultivate a good understanding with a free S. America, and resolution to protect the Western Hemisphere from the vows and machinations of the Holy Alliance.

'The Brazils is the only part respecting which I feel uneasy. Who can have confidence in the existing state of things? But perhaps some permanent arrangement may be made under the auspices of England. Spain is in a wretched state. Portugal has just been menaced with a Tyger government. The young savage is, however, exiled; but what a wretched scene does Portugal present and what a sorry prospect! These misfortunes might have all been prevented if France and the Holies had been restrained in their wicked enterprize, but the Castlereagh system was still too much in force, and Canning not sufficiently in the saddle to check the Court. He is now in greater strength, and I have no doubt will be prime minister very soon, for Lord Liverpool's health is too bad for much longer attention to business.'

October 9, 1824 . . . 'I trust the moment is now arrived when the recognition of Columbia will crown General Bolivar's glory, for that recognition is the seal of S. A. Independence. The struggle in Peru has been full of anxiety, but it has greatly added to the Liberator's reputation as a general and a statesman. S. A. has now nothing to fear from an invading force of Spain or the H. A. Let her only guard against internal innovations and Papal fetters of the mind. The Theocracy is the great power which both worlds have to fear most, but, as I have written to Belford,¹ its energies are on the continent making immense efforts with the hope of extending its recuperations to the former colonies of Spain and then anatomising

¹ His son, aide-de-camp to Bolivar.

the system of civil and religious Liberty so happily establishing here. Spain is in a more fearful state of anarchy than ever, but cannot remain long in such a state without the intervention of England, either to insist on a constitutional march of the Government under favor of French garrisons for a given period, or on the evacuation of Spain to give the Spaniards the opportunity of settling their own differences, which will be very soon done by the expulsion of Ferdinand and the Apostolick Junta. I suspect the last measure will be the one adopted, so that Russia may have no pretext to send her contingent in copartnership with France, which is the great object of Russia.

‘France *seems* quiet and pleased with Charles X., who has gracious manners, but France is so politically an abject county that there is no ascertaining a real state of feeling. The Continent is quiet under Alexander’s rod, and Greece, under the most extraordinary circumstances that seemed to render her success impossible, has all *but* established her freedom. Here again I believe Canning’s policy has discomfited the Russian autocrat’s intention, and repaired in great measure the wrongs done under the Diplomacy of his Predecessor. He is certainly the most popular man now in Europe, and what adds to his Honor is his proscription by the H. A. as the Chef des Jacobins. It is the pet term of all the Inquisitors’ agents when his name is mentioned. Nothing has more convinced me that he is a British minister in every sense of the word. . . .’

March 27, 1825. . . . ‘You will have seen that I have undertaken the duty of a Director of the Columbian Association. I did so more for the ambition of rendering service than deriving benefit, but I have now also reason to think the connexion will be advantageous as an investment.¹ . . . I consider England must be henceforth the advanced fortress of South America. Continental connexions will only be secondary to that Policy. The national judgment is in unequivocal unison with this new alliance, and all our thoughts and energies are fixed upon such operating in favour of the New World. Our enemies in Europe may say “that our liberality is selfish.” Be it so in some respects, but that selfishness is the best security for the foundation and preservation of our relations. With the high feeling generated by conquest, the Patriotism and Power of Free Institutions, Steam and British Capital, South America advances to her maturity with hitherto unparalleled speed and solidity of

¹ On September 24, 1827, he wrote :—‘Our C. A. Association has failed entirely, leaving me a loser of 1,250*l.*, and many of the Directors several thousands.’

growth. Canning has been in this instance the most fortunate, and truly, considering the adverse spirit he had to encounter in certain quarters, the most deserving of our statesmen. Russia grumbles, France intrigues, Spain writhes, but I do not expect war to be immediate. The governments know that *they are* at war with *their people*, and that their existence depends upon our fiat. The India news keeps up their spirits a little, and they flatter themselves Ireland will be an auxiliary, but I have no apprehensions that they will be able to profit by either *Lottery*. We have great means to deploy when pressed, and we can by conciliation secure Ireland at any time. It is much to be hoped the moment is arrived.

‘I have no positive direct advices from the Brazils, but I hear from very good sources Don Pedro is playing the autocrat and Fool. I consider that establishment as one of *Passage*, and the sooner it is a matter of past history the better, for the Holy Allies will have a friend and agent the less. Whilst anything is to be done new States like Columbia and her sisterhood must consider nothing is done, and therefore I hope they will not yet sing *Te Deum*, and disband and sleep. France is in Spain, and Spain has Porto Rico and the Havannah open to receive Frenchmen! There must be a new disposition of these offensive points before the hour of repose can be permitted. I say nothing of Chiloe and St. Jean d’Ulloa, for I conceive they of course engage full attention, and will be occupied without pause. Spain still flatters herself she may establish her Princes in the New World, but her financial distress will almost oblige her to barter crowns and pretensions for dollars. Those, however, she will never get over till the French are clear of the Peninsula, and till the Cortes loans are recognised, for what Treaty can be valid when such a monstrous breach of faith is maintained? England is prospering to the greatest degree, not only in her commerce, trade, agriculture, and every branch of Revenue, but in her credit abroad and liberty of system at home. It is a complete reform, and Philosophy and Liberty are in full career of action.’