

experience the same phenomena as regards ourselves. The tension with Germany, which became manifest three years ago, and for which there was really never any sufficient reason, has now relaxed; but the tension with France, visible from an earlier date, became quite acute in September last, and (though at present less pronounced) still occupies our thoughts. It has nothing to do with the old traditional rivalry and hostility of England and France which came down from the Middle Ages and played so great a part in the wars of last century. That feeling of antagonism had quite vanished from the minds of Englishmen, and had been succeeded by friendliness and good-will, based on more frequent personal intercourse and on the commercial benefits of a large and (at times) expanding trade maintained, in spite of a French protective tariff, between the two countries. When Louis Napoleon fell, in 1870, all English Liberals rejoiced, and most of them, in their sympathy for the Republic, expected the relations between the two great free peoples to become exceptionally cordial. Nor did the English Tories show any disposition to regard a republic with dislike. Nevertheless, we perceived, rather more than twenty years ago, signs of hostility in the French Press and Chambers, and thenceforward occasions for diplomatic disputes between the two Governments seemed to multiply. These signs of dislike became more patent, these occasions of friction grew more frequent, after British troops were landed in Egypt to re-establish the authority of the Khedive, in 1882. England had invited France to join her in the occupation and France had refused, so that the mere entrance of a British force could not be complained of. But England, which has declared that she did not mean or wish to continue to occupy Egypt, found herself unable to withdraw, because withdrawal would have resulted in a fresh collapse of the Egyptian Government. France has resented her continued presence on the Nile, though the fact that a great part of the Egyptian debt is held by French investors is supposed to have had the effect of checking French pressure for England's withdrawal. Ever since 1882 Egyptian affairs have been an unceasing source of friction between the two countries; but British Ministries, even those most anxious to live on good terms with France, have never been able to devise a plan under which our troops could be removed without the risk of plunging Egypt into anarchy. The only exception was in 1887, when Lord Salisbury put forward a scheme to be embodied in a convention with the Sultan; but the French Government opposed it and it was never ratified.

Meanwhile fresh difficulties arose with France in other quarters. What has been called "the race for Africa" began between four great Powers—Germany, France, Italy, and Britain. The success of Britain in establishing colonies, many of which have had a splendid development, had stimulated the other three nations to acquire colonial territories; and, as Africa was almost the only part of the world left unappropriated, it was in Africa that the competition for territory became most strenuous. As the unappropriated parts of that continent were all within the tropics, and nearly all unfit for European settlement, their value, even for purposes of trade, is vastly inferior to the value of temperate regions, and is in some cases most problematical. Nevertheless, the four Powers pressed in, each stimulated by the example of the other, and in several places the interests, or claims, of Britain and France came into collision. This story is too long and too intricate to be told here. Suffice it to say that the position became, from 1894 onward, very strained in West Africa, especially in the basin of the Niger, and was with difficulty adjusted by an agreement concluded in the summer of 1898. The annexation by France of Madagascar and the imposition of a high protective tariff there, in derogation of the treaties under which England had enjoyed a large share of the trade of the island, furnished another ground of dispute which has not yet been settled. There were, moreover, controversies over Siam, where France has extended her dominion; and there have quite recently been controversies over trade interests and railways in China.

I will not attempt to determine the merits of each of these numerous quarrels, nor would the opinion of an Englishman be deemed impartial, however much he might try to make it so. The broad result has been that the general sentiment of England, which had for a long time been little affected by these disputes, and had, indeed, given little attention to them, began, about four or five years ago, to be seriously stirred. Those who watched the course of events closely knew that what seemed to be the unfriendly attitude of France was not due to any general unfriendliness of the French nation taken as a whole. In a country like France the conduct of the Government does not necessarily represent the feeling of the people, for it has to regard parliamentary considerations and is liable to be influenced by a "colonial group." Neither does the language of the newspapers represent it. Some of the French newspapers went great lengths. Many, for instance, attributed the anxiety of England to secure the protection of the Eastern Christians at the time of the massacres of 1895 and 1896 to a selfish desire to gain something for herself in the East, and even accused her of having invented the massacres, or stirred up the troubles, though, of course, nothing in the world vexed and embarrassed the English Government more than the occurrence of those troubles. But everywhere in Europe newspapers find it an easier and more agreeable task to stir up ill-feeling than to allay it. The matter came to a head over the Fashoda incident, last September. In that month the conquering force of British and Egyptian troops found a small French expedition established at a point on the Upper Nile which the English Government had, more than three years before, declared they would deem it an unfriendly act for France to occupy.

Everybody in America, as well as in Europe, knows what an explosion of English feeling this incident evoked. The vehemence of that explosion, however, was not really due to any hatred of France. It arose from the fact that the English, rightly or wrongly, thought that Lord Salisbury's Government had failed in various parts of the world to duly defend English interests, and that, in particular, too many concessions had been made to France. Things looked very serious.