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### ***Venezuela as a Regrettable Phenomenon***

The terrifying Anglophobe, who holds that England can do no right, is a-clamor over the Venezuelan affair. In his judgment the "high-handed measures" of the British, and, incidentally, the German, Government, are a distinct violation of international law, a defiance to the United States and an impious flying in the face of republican institutions.

It is probably less bad than all that. It appears that nothing has been done by the two effete European monarchies without the knowledge and assent of our Government. Our State Department has known all along that the creditor nations intended to signify the exhaustion of their patience by such "high-handed measures" as we were willing to permit.

As to "international law," it would be more accurate to call these measures a violation of it if there were such a thing as international law. In their dealings with one another, friendly or otherwise, nations, like individuals, observe certain courtesies, restraints and forebearances when the cost of disregarding them might be too great. The body of these prudent observances is called international law, but it has nothing of the force of law, for there is neither a tribunal to enforce it nor a prescribed penalty for its violation. Like individuals, nations do what they dare. The individual is explicitly told what he will be permitted to do; the nation is told (by expounders of "international law") what it is customary to do. That constitutes only a moral obligation, and nations are not moral. For that matter, individuals are not. How many of us, having an obdurate debtor, would not "take it out of his hide" if we safely could? In dealing with a little nation a big nation safely can. Generally speaking, it can do nothing else, for, generally speaking, little nations are great scoundrels. For their sin of insignificance they impose upon themselves the penance of dishonesty. In minor human affairs a considerable advance toward righteousness may be observed; even in business men sometimes order their conduct with a partly conscious reference to the Decalogue and the Golden Rule. But in international matters righteousness has only a verbal existence. No nation ever acts towards others from any but a purely selfish motive. It is customary to argue of the righteousness and reasonableness of things in diplomatic correspondence, just as if these virtues had a determining weight, but the humor of all that is made obvious by the candid requirement of an interested motive. Doubtless, for example, we persuaded ourselves of a purely human and generous intention in demanding the withdrawal of Spain from Cuba; yet President McKinley felt it necessary to explain to the world at great length and with such ingenuity as he could command that our own interests were involved. That gave us a standing in the matter, a right to act; the noble sentiments that we thought ourselves to entertain toward the oppressed Cubans we frankly recognized as insufficient justification for our interference.

When our Government recently suggested to the European powers the better observance of a treaty to which itself was not a party it affirmed, first, its solicitude for the people that the treaty had been made to protect, and, second, an injury to American interests. By the latter plea it

credentialed itself. Its actual motive did not struggle for expression. It is one of the civil observances of diplomacy to leave that to the imagination of one's correspondent.

Possibly the motives of Great Britain and Germany are as selfish as "international law" requires; their harmony makes it seem likely that they are even more so. Even so it is to be regretted that there is any "Venezuelan incident" at all—even that there is any Venezuela. It is not seen how the big creditors can enforce their demand against an intelligent resistance without seizure of territory; and then we should have to fight for the Monroe doctrine—or give it up! That is not a situation that we should like to face just for the fun there is in it. We should fight of course, but suppose it should then appear that all the apparent European anxiety for our good will has been merely a cover for a tremendous alliance against us with a view to effacing the Monroe doctrine from the list of things to be reckoned with. In a war of the hemispheres we should perhaps find time to regret that while remaining Monroe doctrinaires we had the indiscretion to consider the Old World a suitable field for American conquest and colonization.