

THE TREATY OF GENT: THE BRITISH PERSPECTIVE

door

Michael DUNNE

In offering the British perspective on the Treaty of Gent, a historian must first acknowledge the stark truth that the Peace of Gent and the preceding War of 1812 find little place in the British historical consciousness. Indeed, in a recent study of British foreign policy in the nineteenth century, neither the War nor the Peace are mentioned at all ¹. Even the ancient and beautiful city of Gent itself lives in British popular imagination as the romantic, somewhat indistinct source of unstated but decidedly “good news” conveyed on horse-back during battles waged many hundreds of years ago. I refer, of course, to Robert Browning’s well-loved ballad or “dramatic lyric”, reputedly set in more than 800 musical versions: “How they Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix” ². Mention 1812 or 1814 in British company and the responses will most likely be to the *grande armée* and the Retreat from Moscow; to Napoleon and Tchaikovsky. Collectively our British memories are not of the defeat at Plattsburg or even the victory at Bladensburg, though they may stretch to New Orleans, the bombardment of Fort McHenry, the Star-Spangled Banner and the destruction of Washington. Pub-signs, those problematical indicators of folk-history, commemorate Waterloo and Wellington - not the engagements and commanders in the Chesapeake and on Lakes Champlain, Erie and Ontario.

These qualifications are not meant to devalue popular history but rather to make the simple point that the War of 1812 and the Peace of Gent meant and mean different things to contemporaries on either side of the Atlantic and to historians and policy-makers of a later date. Since other contributors have examined the immediate national detail and general international context of the war and subsequent peace between the Americans and the British, the following pages will attempt to assess the significance of the Treaty of Gent in Anglo-American relations from the War for Independence until our own times ³.

(1) John Clarke, *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy, 1782-1865: the National Interest* (London, 1989).

(2) *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning* (London, 1863), I, pp. 250-51.

(3) Terminology can be treacherous and misleading. I use the term Anglo-American for convenience to refer to relations between the USA and the United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Ireland) in its various historical forms. For the confusion, see eg. H.C. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: a History of Anglo-American Relations (1783-1952)* (London, 1954).

First we need to remember the origins of the War of 1812. To adopt an old distinction, there were both the immediate and long-term grievances on the American side. The most important of the immediate grievances were the violations of neutral rights as the Royal Navy sought to break Napoleon's autarkic "continental system", in particular by the impressment or forced conscription of alleged British subjects from American vessels to man His Majesty's ships of war. In other words, maritime rights were the most explosive issue between the would-be neutral, the United States, and the desperate belligerent; and the British government would not concede on these rights because they were seen as vital to defeating the land-based enemy of France and her allies. But these immediate controversies simply, if dangerously, exacerbated existing American resentments over the security and limits of the Canadian border, the fears and reality of Indian attacks, and the British restrictions on access to the fisheries of the North East and the trade of the Caribbean colonies. All these issues had been the subject of the negotiations leading to Jay's Treaty in 1794 (the Anglo-American Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation); and critics of that Treaty now felt vindicated a second time in their charges that the Federalists had conceded to the old enemy for narrow ideological reasons and short-term commercial and financial gain⁴. Then there were the less publicized causes of war. Chief among these was the desire in the northern States of the Union to acquire territory (rather than simple rights) in the Canadian colonies—a desire matched in the South and West by land-hunger towards the Floridas and beyond the line of the Louisiana Purchase (1803) in the area that became known as the Oregon territory, as well as on the other side of the Red River in the lands that were to form the Republic of Mexico⁵.

Innumerable pages have been written on the military and naval campaigns of the War of 1812⁶. From them we can see that the war ended not so much in a draw as in stalemate; for the forces on either side were not equally matched but rather incomparable.

The British, especially after 1814, were superior on the high seas, while the Americans were superior on land and the inland waters. But there were no allies for the Americans to use to tip the balance against the British, as there had been in the War for Independence (1776-1783). There was, it was plain to see, a marked parallel with the contemporaneous struggle in Europe and over Europe, which the British saw centred on the struggle with France and which would be won only when the rest of the maritime and

(4) Jerald A. Combs, *The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers* (Berkeley, 1970); John C. Fredriksen, *Free Trade and Sailors' Rights: a Bibliography of the War of 1812*. Bibliographies and Indexes in American History, No. 2 (Westport, Ct., & London, 1985).

(5) Alexander DeConde, *This Affair of Louisiana* (New York, 1976); Reginald C. Stuart, *United States Expansionism and British North America, 1775-1871* (Chapel Hill, NC., & London, 1988).

(6) Dwight L. Smith, *The War of 1812: an Annotated Bibliography*. Wars of the United States, vol. 3. Garland Reference Library of Social Science, vol. 250 (New York & London, 1985); Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: a Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana, 1989).

land forces of Europe combined with the British against the French. Such, at least, was the British strategic perspective on the final stages of the Napoleonic Wars.

The long-term lessons of this European strategic asymmetry emerged over many generations⁷. But it was not many months before the war called for in June 1812 by President James Madison ("Mr Madison's War") was on the path to a negotiated settlement⁸. Tsar Alexander I, worried about the strength of an ally and the source of his own military funds, and also eager to deny British doctrine and practice on maritime rights, offered mediation. But what ultimately produced negotiations between the British and the Americans was the common realization that victory over the other was impossible. Ex-President Thomas Jefferson was only one American to voice the perception that the defeat of Napoleon, "a great blessing for Europe", threatened "misfortune" for the United States.

Conversely, the outstanding British general, the Duke of Wellington, his prestige and influence enormous even before Waterloo and set to assume the North American command, appreciated that the chances of outright victory in the American theatre and the human and financial costs of the attempt made continuation of the war both stupid and wasteful⁹. From various quarters, including the Tsar's St. Petersburg, American and British plenipotentiaries travelled to Gent in the late summer of 1814. Four months later the negotiators finished their labours. The Peace of Christmas Eve was concluded¹⁰.

Many historians have commented most favourably on the quality of the American delegates at Gent: John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, Albert Gallatin, James A. Bayard and Jonathan Russell. By contrast the British negotiators, Henry Goulburn, Vice-Admiral Gambier and Dr. William Adams, have generally been held in less regard. But the comparison is misplaced; and it rather overlooks the circumstances of the negotiations and their results. First and most obviously, as Russell (himself dismissed by contemporaries as "a mere cypher") sadly but accurately observed: British attention was focussed on the "Great Congress" at Vienna—not on the "little Congress" at Gent¹¹. Coming between the Treaty of Chaumont in March 1814, Napoleon's abdication, his banishment to Elba, the Hundred Days culminating in Waterloo (June 1815) and the subsequent Treaty of Paris in November 1815, the negotiations at Gent, rather like the War

(7) A.W. Ward & G.P. Gooch, eds., *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, 1783-1919*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1922-1923) is the standard, still invaluable work. It is cited below as *Cambridge History*.

(8) J.C.A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783-1830* (Princeton, 1983).

(9) Bradford Perkins, *Castlereagh and Adams: England and the United States, 1812-1823* (Berkeley, 1964), p. 27; Dudley Mills, "The Duke of Wellington and the Peace Negotiations at Ghent in 1814", *Canadian Historical Review* 2 (1921), pp. 19-32.

(10) Fred L. Engelman, *The Peace of Christmas Eve* (New York, 1963).

(11) Perkins, *Castlereagh and Adams*, pp. 47, 93.

of 1812 itself, were a "sideshow". Secondly, and perhaps more to the point of the comparison, the British delegates were essentially that, *delegates*, rather than *plenipotentiaries*. In other words, they were meant to take their orders from nearby London; whereas the Americans, thousands of miles and many weeks removed from Washington, simply had to be able to negotiate with the confidence of Madison's administration. Finally, for all their objective abilities, the Americans were not noticeably able to satisfy the demands which had *ostensibly* led their country to declare war. Indeed, even more so than on the question of the quality of the American delegation, there is widespread agreement that there has rarely been a peace treaty which so signally failed to address the reasons adduced for the fighting of a war¹².

A drawn war, or rather a war ending in stalemate, had produced an uncertain peace. What, then, did contemporaries make of the War of 1812 and the apparently inconclusive Treaty of Gent? Perhaps nothing better expresses the contemporary impact of the war than the two different voices of Tory and Radical Britain. In the judgment of *The Times* [London] the "first [Revolutionary] war with England made [the Americans] independent - their second made them formidable"; while William Cobbett saw in this so-called Second War of Independence a magnificent vindication of the new nation, which had "proved that her Government, though free as air, [was] perfectly adequate to the most perilous of wars"¹³. In their different ways, British diplomats were just as impressed and adjusted British foreign policy accordingly.

From 1812 to 1827 British foreign policy was shaped above all by the two Foreign Secretaries, Lord Castlereagh and George Canning. Their lives and rivalry have frequently been described; and this personal detail has perhaps obscured their intellectual and ideological contribution to the development of Anglo-American relations. Castlereagh's contribution was the greater, if only because he was Foreign Secretary (1812-1822) at the time of the War of 1812 and the Treaty of Gent; while Canning's more subtle role in the making of British policy towards America, North and South, was overshadowed by President James Monroe and the enunciation of his famous Doctrine in 1823¹⁴.

We have seen that Wellington was opposed to continuing the War of 1812: the human and economic costs would be enormous; success would not be certain. Castlereagh was equally opposed; and it was he who formulated the theoretical reasons for a negotiated peace. So long as Great Bri-

(12) *Cambridge History*, I, p. 522.

(13) Perkins, *Castlereagh and Adams*, p. 2; Kate Caffrey, *The Lion and the Union: the Anglo-American War of 1812-1815* (London, 1978), pp. 281-82.

(14) Harold W.V. Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1822-1827: England, the Neo-Holy Alliance, and the New World* (London, 1925); Charles K. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh, 1815-1822: Britain and the European Alliance* (London, 1981); *eadem*, *George Canning* (London, 1973).

tain was fighting in North America, it was vulnerable in Europa. Primarily for simple military reasons but also for more fundamental diplomatic principles, Britain's interests required a "balance of power" or "just equilibrium" in Europe; and the delicate task of constructing and maintaining such a balance would be difficult, if not impossible, while the United States remained an enemy. Once engaged in a war in either Europe or America, Britain had enemies at her back. Put, therefore, in the simplest terms: peace in Europe required peace in North America. (The third element in Castlereagh's diplomatic triad was the independence and military ineffectiveness of the Lowlands, i.e. British control of the North Sea and its eastern shores: hence, first, the enlargement of the Kingdom of the Netherlands; and then, after his death, British commitment to the formal independence and neutrality of the new Belgium).

Canning, Foreign Secretary from 1822-1827, tried something more elaborate still; and his policy too consisted of three elements. One part was the use of the newly-independent States of South and Central America as make-weights against the dangers of the Holy Alliance, which had become the latest and immediate threat to the balance of power in Europe; another was to side with the United States in opposing any projection of continental European power into the Americas; and the third was to oust the United States from the role of self-proclaimed protector of the liberties of Monroe's "Southern brethren"¹⁵. Canning's elaborate scheme did not hold. Castlereagh's simpler policy worked, at least in its American elements; and the rest of this paper will trace in broad outlines the history of that success.

If (as is widely acknowledged) the Treaty of Gent failed by its own terms to resolve most of the problems which had brought on the War of 1812, it did nevertheless provide the means and methods of resolving such controversies in the future. Moreover, the simple fact of peace removed the most immediate *casus belli*, the British violations of neutral, maritime rights through impressment, blockades, and searches and seizures by the Royal Navy. Such violations and the counter-claims of the British were ignored in the eleven articles of the Treaty; but then in a state of peace between the two countries, these issues were no longer dangerously controversial. On boundaries and territorial disputes, the Peace laid down detailed provisions for the appointment of joint "commissioners", who in the event of disagreement, could refer to a third party "friendly Sovereign or State". So was established the double Anglo-American tradition of the peaceful settlement of borders and of third-party arbitration in case of disagreement between the principals.

The first stage in the peaceful resolution of contentious issues came with the Rush-Bagot agreement of 1817, limiting the British and American naval forces in the Great Lakes region, to be followed immediately by the

(15) Charles K. Webster, ed., *Britain and the Independence of Latin America, 1812-1830: Select Documents from the Foreign Office Archives*, 2 vols. (New York, 1938).

four-part Convention of 1818. Under its terms the US-British governments settled *inter alia* financial claims arising from the War of 1812 and fishing rights off the northeast coast and (most importantly) carried the US-Canadian border from the Lake of the Woods to the Great Divide, with the disputed Oregon territory to the west of the Rockies left open to joint occupation for the next ten years. The last major stage in the process whereby the British tended to get the edge diplomatically came in 1842 with the Webster-Ashburton treaty, which American critics described as too generous to British claims along the disputed Maine-New Brunswick-Quebec border. These three agreements together determined the boundary of the United States and the British Canadian possessions from the Atlantic to the Rockies; and so, in part, fixed the northern extent of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803.

Much the greatest controversy between the two governments lay over the settlement of the Oregon territory - a vast area encompassing today's States of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, parts of Montana and Wyoming, together with the Province of British Columbia. The Americans laid claim to most of British Columbia (north to Parallel 54'40"); while the British hoped to bring the line of their possessions south down to the Columbia River, which now divides Washington from Oregon. In the event and despite the belligerent American expansionist rhetoric of Manifest Destiny and "54'40" or fight", the position of the Anglo-American border was resolved peacefully. By the Oregon (Buchanan-Pakenham) Treaty of 1846 the existing Canadian border along the 49th Parallel was continued westwards to dip south around Vancouver Island; and though Washington and Idaho were conceded by the British, they retained fishing and navigation rights on the Columbia River. (Manifest Destiny found its main enemy and victim in Mexico, which was attacked contemporaneously with the Buchanan-Pakenham negotiations. After two years of war and by the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in February 1848, Mexico lost half its territory to the United States-slavers and free-soilers alike. The inner conflict over slavery was once again (as with Louisiana) projected outwards - and for the final time. The last territorial stage on the road to the Civil War had been set).

Beyond truncated Mexico lay the small republics of the Central American isthmus; and here we have a good measure of the advance of the United States and the retreat of Britain. In 1850 the two governments negotiated the Clayton-Bulwer treaty, which placed any future inter-oceanic canal under joint American-British control. A classic case of imperialism, the Clayton-Bulwer treaty also represented a diplomatic, economic and military equilibrium between the two empires in the Caribbean, at precisely the moment when historians judge the British Empire to have been at its global height. In 1901 this treaty was superseded by the (2nd) Hay-Pauncefote treaty, which with supplementary terms registered the British concession of exclusive rights to the Americans to build, protect and control an isthmian canal. (Two years later, President Theodore Roo-

sevelt helped Panama to "independence" and began constructing the canal in earnest)¹⁶.

One quite definite provision of the Treaty of Gent tends to be forgotten. Article X committed the signatories to end the "traffic in slaves". It was, in truth, a provision "more honoured in the breach than in the observance", as slavery became *the* divisive and decisive issue in American politics for the next half century. In 1841 the Quintuple Treaty between France, Austria, Russia, Prussia and Great Britain afforded reciprocal rights to the five Powers to stop and search vessels for slaves; and this new "Holy Alliance" (in the phrase of the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Aberdeen) posed the risk of a serious clash between the two major Atlantic naval States, whose relations (it has been said) were "poisoned for years" by international adhorrence of the slave-trade¹⁷.

The American Civil War, whose basic cause was the institution of slavery, produced deep splits in British society. The government of Lord Palmerston was sympathetic to the Southern secession; while much of the working-class and the liberal middle-class favoured a Northern victory. Such sociological and ideological divisions are a reminder that in speaking of Anglo-American relations and patterns of governmental behaviour we are dealing in the broadest categories. Furthermore, in America and in the British Isles there was also the ethnic variable. Particularly after the Famine and the Great Migration from Ireland in the 1840s-1850s it becomes increasingly problematical to speak of "British" and "American" attitudes. Nor do the ethnic and wider sociological variations cease with the recognition of the "Irish question" in American politics. After the Irish came the Germans; after them followed the "new immigration" of the late nineteenth-early twentieth century; and as the population-mix of the United States changed (as did that of Canada), so did the sentimental and familial ties of governments and elites across the Atlantic. However, as we can easily see, there was no simple correlation, let alone direct causal connection between these demographic factors and political behaviour. After all, the two Anglo-American wars had been fought when the ties of kinship were closest between the two belligerents.

In the history of Anglo-American relations the Civil War will generally be remembered for the exploits of the C.S.S. Alabama, a Confederate raider, which accounted for the loss of dozens of Union ships (totalling some 100,000 tons), until finally sunk off Cherbourg at the time Sherman was marching from Tennessee into Georgia (June 1864). The outrage caused in the North led to demands for millions-even billions-of dollars in compensation from the British; and the resulting Treaty of Washington (1871), with its provisions for the arbitration *inter alia* of these claims and the final

(16) David McCullough, *The Path between the Seas: the Creation of the Panama Canal, 1870-1914* (New York, 1977).

(17) *Cambridge History*, II, pp. 245-47.

settlement of \$ 15.5 million, became a landmark in the history of the peaceful resolution of international disputes¹⁸. Formal arbitration now joined political compromise as the two great instruments of Anglo-American diplomacy, with the British government in London (often acting for Canada and her Provinces) conciliating the Americans as the United States grew unmistakably into a world Power. Seal-hunting in the Bering Sea (1893); the double Venezuelan crisis of 1895 and 1902 (the first over the border with British Guiana, the second over foreign debts); the boundary of Alaska with Canada (1903); the negotiation and re-negotiation of the Isthmian Canal Treaty (1900-1901) - all showed the British concern to stay on good terms with the Americans. Yet mutually acceptable governmental policies were not synonymous with popular feeling. So while British opinion was generally favourable to American actions in the conflict over Cuba (if not in the Philippines), the Boer War was unpopular with large sections of the American public¹⁹.

No period of Anglo-American relations since the Revolution has been more closely studied than the years at the turn of the century: the period of the "great rapprochement"²⁰. Class, race, culture, language, strategy, economics - the variables are numerous and complex. Yet through all the detail the general pattern emerges clearly. During the ministries of Salisbury, Balfour and Campbell-Bannerman and through their foreign secretaries, Lansdowne and Grey (the years 1895-1908), the British government consciously deferred to the United States in North America, Central America and in the Pacific Ocean (Samoa)²¹. (Salisbury was both Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary from 1895-1900). This informal alliance would survive and be the key to British victory in World War I. Belligerent rights, the prime cause of the War of 1812 and which were ignored rather than resolved for decades until an interim arrangement was reached with the Washington arbitration (1871-1873), did not produce a fatal rupture in 1914-1917 for all the strain put upon them by the British naval actions. Instead the German High Command took the fatal gamble of attacking their de facto enemy (the Americans) in a desperate attempt to destroy the maritime life-line of the official enemy, the British²². That gamble failed - as a later one did in 1941 - and the British emerged on the winning side in the two World Wars of this century. This outcome was not a fluke, a happy outcome of British "muddling through"; rather it should be seen as the result of a deliberate policy, crafted over decades, and

(18) Goldwin Smith, *The Treaty of Washington 1871: a Study in Imperial History* (Ithaca, NY., 1941); Adrian Cook, *The Alabama Claims: American Politics and Anglo-American Relations, 1865-1872* (Ithaca, NY., 1975).

(19) Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908* (Berkeley, 1967).

(20) Bradford Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1895-1914* (New York, 1968).

(21) Paul M. Kennedy, *The Samoan Triangle: a Study in Anglo-German-American Relations, 1878-1900* (New York, 1974).

(22) The best introduction is Ernest R. May, *World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957).

having its intellectual base in the policies constructed by Castlereagh at the time of the War of 1812 and the subsequent Treaty of Gent. For it was then that (as one scholar wrote) "the doctrine of continuity in the conduct of Foreign Affairs [was] brought to birth". As Castlereagh's leading biographer, the diplomatic historian Charles Webster rightly noted:

[Castlereagh] saw from the first the fundamental fact that more friendly relations between the two nations was of far more importance to Britain than any brilliant diplomatic triumph...and [consequently] handled affairs never to offend the susceptibilities of the United States.

In Castlereagh's own words, as he commented on his policy to the American Minister in London, Richard Rush: it was

of less moment which of the parties [the British or the Americans] gained a little more or lost a little more...than that controversies should be adjusted, and the harmony of the two countries...be made secure²³.

Historians of British foreign policy are aware that fellow Britons as well as continentals have alleged that the "Anglo-Saxons" and the British in particular have an aversion to systematic theorizing when it comes to diplomacy²⁴. The record of Anglo-American relations scarcely supports this generalization. On the contrary, the paradox of British diplomacy lies in the skill with which practitioners claim to act *ad hoc* while yet displaying powerful lines of tradition. As we have seen, this basic pattern is not disproved by the obvious examples of vigorous, competitive, even belligerent rhetoric. The simple point is that successive British governments did not allow these tensions to break out into hostilities. Recent scholarship on the interwar and early post-war years clearly testifies to the deep divisions and some real antagonisms between London and Washington: over the Anglo-Japanese alliance, naval armaments, imperial preferences, the roles of the City and Wall Street, oil sources - and much more²⁵. But the inescapable fact is that whenever the British were and have been seriously at odds with the Americans, the British have eventually fallen into line. From the Caribbean at the turn of the century to Suez in the mid Fifties and up to our own day, this has been the pattern of Anglo-American relations - a pattern set essentially 175 years ago. So far from the Americans enjoying the "free security" afforded by the Royal Navy in the nineteenth century, it has been the British, with their territorial and commercial interests in

(23) *Cambridge History*, III, p. 555; Webster, *Foreign Policy of Castlereagh*, pp. 446, 453; Hinde, *Castlereagh*, p. 247.

(24) Andre Tardieu, quoted in W.N. Medlicott, ed., *From Metternich to Hitler: Aspects of British and Foreign History, 1814-1939* (London, 1963), p. 6; Algernon Cecil, *Cambridge History*, III, p. 539.

(25) The literature is enormous. For a recent addition, see Randall Bennett Woods, *A Changing of the Guard: Anglo-American Relations, 1941-1946* (Chapel Hill, NC., 1990).

North and South America, who have deferred to the Americans across the Atlantic²⁶.

One basic theme of the preceding pages has been that British policy towards the United States has been determined in large measure by British interests in and towards Europe. Naturally the question arises: what has been the effect upon Britain's European policy of this pro-American diplomacy? Here is material for many pages of analysis and speculation. But given the context of our reflections on the Treaty of Gent, we can find no better starting-point than the speech delivered by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in September 1988 at Brugge²⁷. Aside from the elements of her personal ideology on "deregulation", two historic themes stand out to any student of British foreign policy towards Europe and America. One is the desire to maintain a balancing role towards the countries of Europe - a theme which has its own variants in de Gaulle's Europe of sovereign nations and Gorbachev's vision of a common European homeland. (It may be noted that all three leaders conceptualized a Europe of such countervailing States *before* the formal unification of Germany, East and West). Thatcher's language was allusive but its substance was surely unmistakable. In both her economic and political formulations she was invoking a Europe which Britain could manipulate through *ad hoc* combinations. Here is the politico-diplomatic formulation: "We shall always look on Warsaw, Prague and Budapest as great European cities". Added to the old principle of "divide and rule" we see the notion of increasing the State actors to multiply the potential countervailing combinations - a latter-day version of the pluralism to be found in James Madison's contribution to the Federalist Papers. Then there comes the politico-economic formulation:

We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain only to see them reimposed at a European level, with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels.

As we have seen, to play this role of balancer, British governments have for nearly two centuries looked to a secure, peaceful relationship with the United States. Consequently Thatcher set her vision of the new Europe *within* rather than alongside or as an alternative to the "special relationship" with the United States. But the language of the "special relationship" (so redolent of the British detachment despised by leaders like de Gaulle) was at Brugge modulated into the language of the Cold War. In Thatcher's eyes, the European Community should be part of

that Atlantic Community - that Europe on both sides of the Atlantic-which is our greatest inheritance and our greatest strength.

(26) For a listing of some of the relevant literature, see Michael Dunne, *The United States and the World Court, 1920-1935* (London, 1988).

(27) *The Times*[London], 21 September 1988.

Admirers as well as critics of Margaret Thatcher comment on the “populist“, “instinctive“, even “visceral“ nature of her politics at home and abroad ²⁸. In fact we can see that there is something else at work here: her acceptance of two traditional themes in British diplomatic practice. One is the continuing desire to play the role of arbiter of European affairs; the other is the belief that such a role can be played only by maintaining a privileged relationship with the United States. The contemporary evidence suggests that while the former may be possible, it can no longer be premised on a specially favourable relationship with the United States. The contemporary evidence suggests that while the former may be possible, it can no longer be premised on a specially favourable relationship with the United States. Certainly the record of Thatcher’s tenure in office is of deference to the United States; but there is little sign of reciprocity. It might be tempting to think that a different political party in government in the United Kingdom would produce a change in attitudes towards Europe, both the Europe of the Community and the wider Europe. But the signs are that even the Labour Party, the only likely alternative party of government, is busily polishing its pro-American credentials. However, there are also signs that the Labour Party is aiming to present itself as more committed to Europe than the Conservatives ²⁹. Perhaps the suspicion American administrations traditionally feel towards the Labour Party will work to the advantage of a European policy: with little sympathy for them in Washington, perhaps a Labour administration in London would indeed embrace a social democratic Europe - if only by default?

At the conclusion of the negotiations in Gent, John Quincy Adams uttered a few words which have since become famous:

I hope that the doors of the temple of Janus, closed here at Ghent, shall not be opened for the next century.

As an expression of hope for peace between the United States and Great Britain, Adam’s words came true - and for much longer than anyone might have reasonably predicted. Janus, the most ancient of the Roman gods, symbolizes a vision of the past and our outlook on the future, pivoted like doors to be opened or closed towards progress or reaction. For one British historian there remain three abiding and co-mingled memories of Gent during the celebrations commemorating the Anglo-American Peace. One is of the generosity and warmth of the townspeople whose ancestors were hosts to the American and British delegates in 1814--the openness of the people of Gent towards strangers and guests. The second, deeply affecting impression is of the psychiatric hospital, Psychiatrisch Centrum Sint-Jan

(28) *The Economist* [London], 17 February 1990: ed. “Britain’s World View”.

(29) David Marquand, “Trading Places at the Seaside”, *The Guardian* [London & Manchester], 5 October 1990.

De Deo, once the site of the peace-signing and now made into an open community for its dwellers, not an institution closed off from the outer world. And the third memory is of being at Gent when Europe, West and East, was opening itself to itself across the barriers of the Cold War. Perhaps it is reasonable for us to hope that in symbolically reclosing the doors of Janus, we can in reality open up new possibilities beyond Gent; and that this will indeed be its "good news" in the years to come.