

RESEÑA

Inglaterra y España en 1898

by **Rosario de la Torre del Rio**

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After centuries of disagreement over *orden tradicional* versus *orden moderno* it could be said that Great Britain and Spain formed an “odd alliance” in the course of the nineteenth century.

The 19th century began with an alliance between the two nations alluded to in this book against the French, and which could be described as one of friendly times and other times of coolness between the two countries. De la Torre del Rio set out some years ago to find a few clues for the unusual nature of the alliance.

In order to understand why relations broke down between Spain and Great Britain in 1898, when the Spanish-American conflict occurred, in this book she summarizes their love-hate relationship during the whole Nineteenth century and explains why this relationship is representative of the world situation at this specific moment.

At the present time, her contributions continue to be a point of reference and are even now one of the most relevant in their field for not only researching foreign official documents between the six main countries involved in different order in the Spanish-American war (Great Britain, United States, Spain, France, Russia and Germany) but also taking private letters and personal notes such as treaties and articles in the press to produce a wider perspective of what was happening at this time. Thus, historiographically, her perspective is considered to be the only one which studies in depth the special relationship between Great Britain and Spain, in the context of war.

Certainly as she deals with the final stages of the century, one can perceive much better the results of the different phases of coexistence between the two nations including military, economic, technical, industrial and social.

She follows the Spanish crisis of 1898 step by step and within that the loss of the last Spanish colonies to the USA. This is generally considered to be a result of a wider global process called “los 98” by J. Pabón¹ and developed by the greatest authority J.M Jover Zamora.²

She focuses especially on the situation in Great Britain fostered by some representative politicians such as Lord Salisbury, Chamberlain, Balfour, Pauncefote and Drammond Wolff. The ambiguous British position created by some of these politicians and the relevance of their different personalities is shown by the Foreign Office maintaining a strict silence and calling for neutrality during the Spanish-American conflict while the British Embassy in Washington received instructions not to anger the American Government.

She explains the cooperation between Great Britain and the USA, and gives some reasons for Britain’s need for alliances in order to maintain the balance of power on the international stage.³

De la Torre del Rio also expounds the Spanish search for support against the American Administration and the varying reactions of other European countries to the Spanish petition for help; including the role of the Vatican, whose mediation was also sought by the Spanish Government.⁴ She also analyzes precisely the dismay felt by the Spanish government on observing the gradual change of heart in British politics, emphasized too by some of the English press (for example, “*National Review*” of London).

She goes on to mention some Spanish sector of opinion who described British politics as “*utilitarian*” when they believed the British Government, was taking the side of McKinley, in order to protect her own interests in the Far East. Here it is important to consider the implications of using the term utilitarianism in a country such as 19th

¹ A struggle amongst some of the imperial countries for the domination of colonies. Cfr. Pabón, J. “El 98, acontecimiento internacional”. *Días de ayer. Historias e historiadores contemporáneos*. Barcelona, 1963, pp. 139-195.

² J.M. Jover Zamora. *1898. Teoría y práctica de la redistribución colonial*. Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española. 1979.

³ J.A Rodríguez-Esteban. “Geopolitical Perspectives in Spain: from The “Iberismo” of the 19th century to the Hispanoamericanismo of the 20th”. *Finis terra* XXXIII, 65 (1998). pp. 185-193.

⁴ Cuenca Toribio, J.M. *Relaciones Iglesia-Estado en la España Contemporánea*. 2ª ed. Madrid: Alhambra, 1989.

century Spain so influenced by the hierarchy of the church, which demonized this well established English philosophy as being opposed to *true* thought; that is, naturally at that time, Catholic thought.

A large part of the book is dedicated to different aspects of the early stages of the international laws of the sea and we can see how their evolution influenced some aspects of the Modern Western legal tradition. Likewise, the issue of “*neutrality*” is at the heart of global developments so it is natural that the author expanded on the different phases of its pursuit.

She traced back negotiations, treaties and agreements in the course of the century in search for neutrality such as the Foreign Enlistment Act, Congress of Paris, letters of marque and the Washington Treaty, and likewise the role played by each different country involved in the Spanish-American war.

In a brief portrait of the situation: while Spain, in precarious circumstances, was asking Britain to maintain neutrality, the latter was having pressure put on by the USA in order to participate in her favor. Meanwhile, the British Government was re-examining its position in the developing international order, and within this, a new colonial distribution.⁵

The author portrays a polyhedrous political situation between European countries, and their conflicting areas of interest and influence -the Near East, the Pacific, China, Africa and the Caribbean, Mediterranean and Atlantic areas-, expounding above all the coincidence of interest in Africa and China, adding the important role of the Russians in destabilizing the Far East. Moreover, she outlines in detail the confliction between Salisbury and Chamberlain about political alliances after the arrival of the Russian navy to Port Arthur in Eastern China. Likewise the debate provoked among the British public about Great Britain’s traditional isolation.

In connection with this issue, she traced the statement of *Social Darwinism* and its relation with the famous speech of Salisbury about “*dying countries*” and “*living countries*”.⁶ Furthermore she explains how in Spain, when it was received with tremendous displeasure, once again, the call for alliance between conservative thought

⁵ L. L. Johnson. “Presidential Leadership in Foreign Affairs: McKinley’s role in the Spanish/American War” [on line] Boletín Americanista 36 (1986) [ref. 29 April] <http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=2937798>.

⁶ *The Times*, May 5th 1898 “The Primrose League. Speech by Lord Salisbury”

and the Church occurred. Application of the Theory of Evolution to the geopolitical system was used to arouse anti-British feeling. The Pope called for “*El Ejército Católico*”, that is to say powerful Catholic associations (“*cofradías*”, women’s, and others), to work against Protestantism as being erroneous thinking.⁷

A crucial chapter is dedicated to the Gibraltar issue, which became an important area of British-Spanish negotiations over the threat of war between Spain and the USA, and was used by both sides as a pressure point. Paradoxically, after the Spanish-American war, Gibraltar was again used to bring them together. As the book demonstrates, the British colony became at that time a kind of political microcosm for the negotiations between Spain and Britain. In fact, the most important international negotiations were linked to it (such as Fashoda, Suez, Ceuta, the Canary Islands, France, and India). Once again, one can appreciate a particular example of “odd alliance”; when Spanish opinion of the British fluctuated between “*naciones amigas*”, during the negotiations over Gibraltar, and “*anti-británico*” feeling caused by the knowledge of a concealed British-American alliance.

Another important element which is present throughout de la Torre del Río’s research is the press. An essential source because of the chosen chronology, she turns to it to find out about public opinion in each country. The press is both a source and a subject of study. De la Torre del Río revises the influence of the press on the political field and its effort to lure the public to its ideology.

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⁷ Priego de Montiano, G. “*Orígenes del Asociacionismo Cordobés Contemporáneo. Tipología asociativa en la Córdoba del XIX (1779-1900)*”, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Córdoba. (en prensa).