

## THE RED FLAG AND THE SCARLET WOMAN

The following comment on a letter from Mr. J. W. Jeudwine, who is one of those persons who pretends that he believes the Pope causes all modern evils from earthquakes to corns, appeared in *Everyman*:—

DEAR EVERYMAN,—You have asked me for my opinion on the interesting letter of Mr. J. W. Jeudwine, called "Things that Matter"; and though, as you know, I am and shall be for the present very busy with the *New Witness*, I am glad to put in an appearance in another periodical which I have always admired.

On the practical point of immediate peace and war I do not differ from Mr. Jeudwine; nor, indeed, do I think that the truth on that point could be better stated.

As for his comments on the Pope's suggestions, I certainly do not think they point to any practicable solution; but neither do I think they derive from any subtle or sinister motive, such as Mr. Jeudwine darkly draws; still less from an historic papal tendency to tyranny; if only because, if I did think this of the Pope, I should also have to think it of the American President, who put the same thing in even plainer words about "peace without victory." Am I to understand that the American Presidency has labored through all ages, using flags and emperors for the cause of tyranny? The simple truth is that both the Pope and the President were misinformed about the military or physical possibilities of the war. They therefore proposed a peace of oblivion, not as a Utopia, but as a *pis aller*. It is also probable and natural enough that the Pope should have some sympathy with the Austrians; but I am pretty sure it is an entire blunder to suppose that this covers the inevitable complexity of his sentiments. If he sympathises primarily with anybody, I should guess it was the Poles—a sympathy in which he evidently cannot claim the fervid support of Mr. Jeudwine.

Mr. Jeudwine talks of the most heroic and most horribly martyred of historic nations, under the strange description of the "R.C. Kingdom of Poland, which never stood for any form of liberty." Of this I will only say, first, that one of the vilest of all the vile things that are really to be urged against Austria is that she took part in the spoliation of Poland, when her own capital of Vienna had only been saved from the tyranny of the Turks by the sword of Sobieski, by the liberality and chivalry of the Poles. And second, that one of the vilest of all the vile things we have learnt from the bad history and bad philosophy of Prussia, is precisely this habit of sneering at the past of Poland. But this is not the only case, though the most concrete one, in which Mr. Jeudwine's tone is exceedingly Teutonic.

The other matter does not directly concern the Pope in politics; though it does more or less indirectly concern the Papacy in history. For Mr. Jeudwine's criticism contains one idea involving, I think, a dangerous English error, and a habit of mind which I hope the English will leave behind them on the battlefield of Europe. I call it an English habit; but it would be even truer to call it a German habit, for we really borrowed it during our long alliance with the Germans.

It may shortly be described as the trick by which a man can praise himself, not only for what he has done, but for everything that he has not done. Thus a man will pretend that it is his sturdy Protestant morality that has alone prevented him from painting the Madonnas of Raphael, or carving the images of Amiens; or that it is merely his healthy and humane dislike of vainglory and vindictiveness which has prevented his being present at the Battle of Solferino. But the even more effective form of this is to deride all these alien achievements as extremes or even extravagances; and by inference to set up oneself as the golden mean. By this process a man may turn a merely negative position into a matter of positive superiority, and look down on his neighbors because they have sometimes made mistakes in the course of doing what he has never attempted to do.

Thus, as we all know, it has long been the habit

of the German to boast at once of being less barbaric than the Slav and less civilised than the Latin; and especially, in the particular case of religion, to boast of being less superstitious than the Russian peasant and less sceptical than the French citizen. Some stodgy little shopkeeper of Frankfurt will swagger about the street in entire self-satisfaction, merely because he has not walked a hundred miles on a pilgrimage to a historic shrine like the Russian, and has not raised an anti-clerical riot and risked his life on a barricade like the Frenchman; because, in short, he has never done anything at all, except eat rather too much, sitting at a table while his women stand and serve him.

Now, of all the many unfortunate effects of our temporary Teutonic connection, I think the tendency to an imitation of this attitude has been the worst. There are great and positive virtues in our insular temper and history, and we have no need to make negative virtues out of the mere absence of the great adventures from which accident has cut us off.

It is as if a man living in the middle of Bohemia were to brag because he never had occasion to be shipwrecked, like Harold, or sea-sick, like Nelson.

We happen never to have had anything like the Holy Roman Empire in England. We happen never to have had anything like the French Revolution in England. Therefore, Mr. Jeudwine dismisses one of them as "the Emperor," who is simply a tyranny, and the other as "the Red Flag," and that is simply a tyranny. Everything is a tyranny and everybody is a tyrant, except the Englishman "of the professional and trading classes"; who goes to church at eleven o'clock on Sundays, and not on Saints' days (even as this Papist), who "connects labor and capital by graciously allowing the former to provide him with the latter; and who is "not led by the agitator"—but only by the *Daily Mail*.

Now I come of middle class Englishmen, and I know their virtues as well as it is safe to know the virtues of one's own social type. But I happen to believe that the middle-class Englishman will never be a fully civilised citizen till he has learned a great deal that is to be learned from the Papacy, from the Holy Roman Empire, and from the Red Flag.

To put it personally, but I trust not impolitely, I don't think Mr. Jeudwine will ever really understand what is going on till he is ready, in some matters, not merely to sit at the feet of a priest but (what would evidently shock him ever more) of a workman. He might learn many things—not the least being the fact that there is not the faintest danger of an ordinary workman being in favor of surrender to Prussia.

Now, it is perfectly true, of course, that the Popes have been on all sides of all sorts of quarrels in the course of their unthinkable thousand years. Sometimes their partisanship has been really inconsistent; often they have had a consistency not apparent without examination, and certainly not to be explained by the simple process of saying that they would side with any sort of tyranny. For long and vital periods they supported pure liberty against pure tyranny, and in many of the quarrels about the republics of medieval Italy. In some cases they actually opposed an alleged tyranny which anybody might have expected them to support—as when a Pope practically took part with William of Orange against James II.

However, I am only concerned here for historical enlargement and imagination; and the truth is, that to attack the Papal system, at least, over great periods of history, is like attacking history itself. There is such a thing as something that is not too small but too big to be hit; at any rate, to be hit in the vitals. It would be difficult to stab to the heart an elephant as big as the earth; and Rome, pagan and Christian, has been more like a planet than a place. Anyhow, men like Mr. Jeudwine have only got hold of a speck of star-dust from such a solar system, just as they have only got hold of a rag of the Red Flag. Such a man is like a critic who should catch sight of the gargoyle on the corner of a church, and should fancy it was the idol worshipped in the shrine. He would think it a very ugly one. He would be right.—Yours faithfully,  
G. K. CHESTERTON.