

THE PRUSSIAN REACTION IN ENGLAND

(By E. T. RAYMOND in *Everyman*.)

It is the fashion of the moment to talk democracy—the more glibly the less we practise it. The Hossannas to Demos ascend in a cacophony of unfamiliar accents. The *Morning Post*, while truthfully admitting that it has never "run democracy to death," still patronises it at least twice a week, in the intervals of prescribing machine-guns for that section of the sovereign people which holds opinions of the kind not current in West of England country houses.

In all this blare of new-found enthusiasm it is not easy to distinguish the still small voice of inveterate enmity. But it is to be heard by those who care to put their ears to the ground. We are passing through one of those testing periods which intensify rather than create opinion. Excitement, like wine, does not change men, but merely exaggerates them, and as dram succeeds dram the true character emerges from the hypocrisies of conventional restraint. The drams have been frequent and potent. There have been the Gerard revelations, the Czar-Kaiser letters the disclosures of M. Venizelos, the damning indictment of Swedish treachery. On different men these strong potions from the secret cellarages of diplomacy have produced different effects. On the one hand they fill certain minds with a loathing the stronger because the thing is at once familiar and surprising. An old evil thought to be long banished is found as malignant as ever. It is as if, after sacrificing an immense deal of fine old panelling to get rid of bugs, one suddenly discovered an apparently impeccable American pitch-pine substitute alive with them. Small wonder that some begin to cry that nothing will suffice but burning down and rebuilding altogether. That is the feeling of many hundreds of thousands of people, a feeling comprehensible enough, but not a little dangerous.

The other mood, however, is even more dangerous. It is, indeed, perhaps the most disquieting feature of the present situation. I refer to the Prussianism which the fight against Prussia has produced or accentuated in many Englishmen. Every new document that comes to light they read backwards, and the result is as unholy as that which was supposed to come of inverting the Lord's Prayer. They see in every wickedness or folly from a foreign court the wisdom of the serpent, and their chief indictment of "democracy" is the quite groundless one that its chief characteristic is the innocence of the dove. Democracy, they say, cannot plot, cannot fight, lacks consistency and resolution, is dissolved in sentiment, is always hankering after peace, can do nothing but talk, and cannot do even that well.

We may muddle through somehow this time (such is the argument), but for the next war we must be better prepared, and the only way to prepare is the German way. "We must fight Germany with her own weapons."

This protective imitation of Prussianism is, in my view, as dangerous as Pacifism of the worst type, and not the less dangerous because it plays into the hands of the Pacifists. It gives them an argument they are not slow to use—that in endeavoring to smash foreign Prussianism we are erecting it at home. Both now and hereafter there is danger in the growth of this attitude. It means estrangement from America, and probably from France. It means that if the Russian revolution consolidates itself Great Britain will be ever suspect as the Power which derided the agonies of its travail. If there is a counter-revolution in Russia it means that British influence will be exerted rather to aggravate than to temper the severity of the triumphant party. It implies disastrous reactions in Imperial and domestic policy. It will destroy all chance of a peaceful reconstruction after the war. It will place a spiritual barrier between the British State and the Dominions. It will mean a new curse of Cromwell on Ireland.

All this, of course, assumes that the spirit manifesting itself in certain quarters will triumph. It is certainly making progress and becoming articulate. I believe serious efforts are being made to proselytise. Young officers on leave are flattered by their social superiors; an ex-bank clerk is made to feel that he belongs to the ruling class, and is inspired with a fine scorn for "the mob"; journalists are given the cue to represent the slow progress of British arms as due to the inherent defects of a "democracy"—as if Great Britain were one! No opportunity is lost to sneer at the Americans, to point to France as an example of political instability as compared with the majestic solidarity of the Germans, to enlarge on Russian disorganisation as the natural result of "democracy." In some circles Russians have been socially boycotted since the Revolution, and Americans are less well received than before the United States entered the war. For behind everything is the terror that America's contribution to victory may entail the eventual Americanisation of British institutions.

These people, doubtless, have no very clear idea of a constructive kind. They can hardly contemplate the erection in this country of the system they admire in Germany, any more than another class of enthusiast expects the establishment forthwith of the full-fledged Socialistic State of its imaginings. At present, like that other class, they are bent on pure destruction. They want to "smash" a number of things that appear to them to stand in the way of their "efficient" ideal. I will not specify those things, but they are fairly obvious. Sufficient to say that there is already a foundation on which a very tolerably good imitation of despotism might be built.

Between the two extremes—the "Prussian reactionaries" and the would-be creators of a new democratic heaven and earth—hover and vacillate the mob of trimmers, numbskulls, and "practical men," whose "views" change with every edition of the evening papers, who are for Kerensky and the Soviet one hour and for a Grand Ducal counter-revolution the next. They are merely the stage crowd ready to cheer Brutus or Mark Antony as the case may be.

Each party is looking forward to the end of the war abroad to begin a war at home. That is the plain English of the matter. Only the fear of Germany suffices to freeze hell over, and every now and then a burst of steam tells us how thin is the crust. On that thin crust gyrate things frivolous and as unsubstantial as water-flies, things called statesmen because language always tends to survive fact. All the signs point to a fierce social struggle, and yet we are soothed by platitudes about the "new brotherhood" the war has brought. These fables may possibly deceive those who utter them. They cannot possibly survive an evening spent either in a north country tap-room or a rich man's club.

The advantage that a believer has over an unbeliever is that he has two suns that shine for him—the solar sun, which shines on the just and unjust alike, and the Sun of Righteousness, which arises for him with healing in His wings.—Walter Rhodes.

Charity is the better, without doubt, for being organised. But if it is so organised that its administration becomes a business, and all personal sympathy, tender pity, and love of God are organised out of it, there is nothing left but a machine. No one can be grateful to a machine.—Rev. J. Havens Richards, S.J.

Despite of all that cynics say,
There sometimes is a perfect day;
Cloudless and dustless, calm and bright,
The day that gives us all delight;
The day that comes to compensate
For cold, grey winter days we hate;
Those drizzling days we'd ne'er endure
Had we no Woods' Great Peppermint Cure.

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