

# THE NORDIC GOES A-SABER-RATTLING

*And Selects an Inconvenient Form of Self-Destruction*

CHARLES EDWARD RUSSELL

ABOUT seven o'clock of a morning of May, a man was lying prone on the coping of the sea-wall by the park in front of the Grand Hotel in Naples. His chin rested upon his folded hands; with an expression of great contentment, he was looking out over the bay toward Vesuvius. The spring that year was gorgeous; the famous scene was at its best. There happened to be no wind; the water was like tiffany glass, full of bronze, crimson, gold, and blue tints; the smoke and steam drifting from the mountain looked like a long white and pink plume. At nine o'clock the man was still there, and at ten. He was poorly dressed, like a laborer; I thought he had something to do with the sea. Soon after ten o'clock I noticed he was gone, but at five he was again in his old place and looking out, this time at the reflected sunset.

"Idiot!" said a Nordic woman in my party. "That is the way with these crazy, lazy Italians. They are all like that. They would rather lie around all day than be at work or doing something useful."

The rest of the Nordics warmly assented. This was indeed the way of the lazy Italians. They would rather look at something beautiful than make something useful; that

was the great trouble with them. All the Nordics everywhere would have said so then; with more confident accent they would say so now. To all such verdicts the highest American authority has given since then the seal of a deliberate and national approval. With a gesture of gratuitous hostility to make all the world wonder, the Congress of the United States has passed an immigration law, declaring in effect that Italians are crazy, lazy people and not fit to associate with us. We will have none of them.

In effect, Congress said this. It would not say so in words, because there are American voters of Italian origin, but this is what it meant. Assumably, it did not mean at the same time to drive a colossal wedge among the nations of the earth, to separate men into two great hostile camps, to breed disastrous hatreds, and to sow the seeds of vast disastrous wars, but these things it did also and not less effectively. Its action was a proclamation to the world of an irrevocable purpose to make this exclusively a Nordic nation, a nation of, for, and by Nordics.

What is a Nordic?

According to the dictionary, he is one that dwells in the North.

Is he superior to one that does not dwell in the North?

Plainly, he must be. We have said so in a statute, in a solemn law of this our land.

Whence, then, does he derive this superiority?

And now we come upon a strange matter, full of recondite mysteries. It is evident that if he is superior, if he is so markedly better than other men that he may justly exclude them from his regard, his superiority must come, (1) from the special favor and reward of Divine Providence, had by exceeding great merit; or, (2) from some rare quality or chemic element in blood or brain different from the elements in others; or, (3) from something magical in his climatic or geographical position, something in the northern cloud, mist, fog, or cold that lifts him above men not so blessed in their weather.

As to the theory of a chosen people, set apart, endowed with peculiar excellences, divinely chartered to rule, every nation that has had a vision of empire has coupled it with exactly this fantastic obsession, but as the event has always reversed the dream the judicious will be slow to believe it means now any more than it meant before. It is true that a wild-eyed cult exists in England whose creed is that the British are the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel and have therefore inherited the promises of special blessings and overlordship read into some prophetic books of the Scriptures; but persons not way-billed for bedlam or Ward's Island will require a more substantial evidence. Shall we look for it in Nordic history? It appears there that the conspicuous Nordic achieve-

ments have been in war, conquest, pillage, the shooting of brown, black, red, and yellow men, the seizing of much territory belonging to somebody else, and at all times and in all ways the avid pursuit of the material aim and the merchantable possession. Nothing in revealed religion, nor in any concept of the Deity better than that of the Papuan, suggests that these blood-stained records can be a valid claim upon the divine reward.

If we turn to heredity, to a possible inheritance of a rarely good quality of blood, an examination of early comments about our ancestors yields little to encourage us. About twelve hundred years ago the forebears of many vauntful Nordics were dwelling in the basin of the Elbe, where they came into much contact with Charlemagne. That astute observer and competent judge left definite testimony as to their valid claims to superiority. He thought they were the greatest liars, scoundrels, hypocrites, and tricksters that ever lived. Subsequently these tribes moved to England, where what is known of them reveals little indication of superior equipment except much capacity to consume meat and drink. It appears therefore that if the blood in Nordic veins is really of an exceptional excellence it must have undergone much purifying in more recent years, and one reading attentively the subsequent Nordic story may be mystified to say when and where the laundering took place.

Hence we are thrown back upon the third theory, that the Nordic's superiority is purely of climatic or geographic origin. He has been fortunate in his habitat; northern suns,

winds, and cold have made of him a choice and radiant spirit above all others. But here we are beset with a new difficulty. If a northerly clime bestows thus virtues and a right to sovereignty, then of course the farther north you go the more potent the charm and the better the Nordic. Eskimos, for instance. They live more to the north than we; they must be still better Nordics. But this conclusion, we find, meets only scorn from the authorities. Nonsense! they say. Eskimos are not Nordics at all.

Well, then, Russians. They live about as far north as anybody going, some of them even inside the arctic circle. Here must be Nordics of purest ray serene.

Not at all. They may live in a northland all right enough, but they are not Nordics. They have a soviet form of government, and that spoils the spell. It will not work where there are soviets.

Well, how about the Poles, then? They live up north and have no soviet to break the magic circuit. They must be of our set.

Never. They have the Danzig Corridor, and it seems that to the essence, elixir, ether, presence, or whatever it is that makes a Nordic a Nordic, corridors are fatal.

Ah, happy thought—the Irish! They have no soviet, they have no corridors, they live far north. At last we have found the perfectly good Nordic.

Wrong again. The Irish are far indeed from the blessed Nordic state—except some that live in Ulster. Of course Irish that live in Ulster and Irish that live out of it are of the same stock, but Irish that live out of

it have not a living chance to get into the Nordic pew.

Japanese, perhaps. Much of Japan lies so far north the snow there is sometimes six feet deep. Shall we register the Japanese?

Certainly not. The Japanese are no Nordics. The enchantment geographical does not work on the other side of the Pacific.

Ah, then, the French! Nearly all Frenchmen live much farther north than nearly all of us. Surely these must be Nordics.

Absurd! The mere suggestion is insufferable. The Nordic philosophy we have chosen obligates us to hate everybody not of our delightfully select order, but most of all to hate the low, miserable, depraved French. Any reading of our enlightened press for the last eight years must have convinced us that for every ill we have suffered from cyclones to croup the horrible machinations of Poincaré, or of Briand, or of both, are solely responsible. No, never the French. Whatever may be elsewhere the wonders of climate and geography, they are inoperative in the case of the Wicked French.

Well, then, Belgians. They live farther north than Eastport, Maine.

No—no Belgians. They are lined up with the hideous French.

Then where is this wondrous being? Where can inquiry meet up with him? Where shall we tree him, that we may note his unmatchable gifts?

It appears that he exists in one country by full rank, in one by brevet, and in one on probation. The truly pure Nordic is to be found only in Great Britain. In the United States, although a faked and fallacious estimate made it to appear that

he amounts to a majority of the population, even that was exceedingly slender and admitted to be much flawed and speckled. In Germany is some Nordicism, but to be accepted with reserve. A German is a Nordic if he behaves himself. Was he Nordic while the war was on? Not if we could trust the British press of that period. What since has happened to atone for sin and scatter the sacred chrism on these once unworthy heads? Nothing, except that German bankers have since been admitted to the international syndicate of finance, and billions of American and English capital have been invested in German industries. Apparently, then, Germany becomes Nordic in proportion as we buy up her factories and possess her railroads. As this process is to be progressive, it might afford a lively hope of an eventually perfect status if it were not for one thing. The readiness with which we found in 1914 that the Germans were not Nordics indicates that we may again make the same discovery and again throw them out of the boat.

This leaves us face to face with one blankly astonishing thought. The dictionaries must be wrong. "Nordic" does not mean one that lives in the North. It means Anglo-Saxon. When we speak of Nordic superiority we mean Anglo-Saxon superiority, and when we speak of Nordic alignments to better (and boss) the earth, we mean the British Empire. Simply this and nothing more.

This being the fact, ought we to talk much about the "pure" and "unmixed" Anglo-Saxon blood as constituting our excuse for enlisting in behalf of Nordic and imperial

expansion? The fashion of the day (or the prevailing style in propaganda) ascribes to a mingled blood in our country a variety of defects in our social structure. But speaking of mixed blood, the Anglo-Saxons seem as much of a blend as anybody. German, Plattdeutsch, Celt, French, Roman, Phenician, are in their make-up, with others not too inspirational. There is besides, and after all, such a thing as logic. Among the peoples that champions of Nordicism wish to class as inferior are the Jews. But the Jews are the only civilized people that in four or five thousand years have an unmixed descent. Compared with them the Anglo-Saxons look more like a hash than a people. If then pure descent is any warrant of dominion, instead of chasing the Jews hence we must pass them the scepter, must we not?

These are only a few of the apparently insoluble problems that begin to assail us as soon as we try to make head or tail of the rationale of this Nordic business.

Laying them all aside, and allowing the English-Speaking Union, the Sulgrave Institute, the Magna Charta Association, the Anglo-American League, and other deep thinkers on this subject to tell us that the Nordics are superior because they are superior (which seems the handiest and most reasonable hypothesis), what are the visible and tangible fruits of this superiority? Far be it from me to dispute eminent authority, but still if we are so much superior that other people are not fit to associate with us, there must be evidences of our better worth; there must be creations, deeds, works, so incontestably and unapproachably

above those of the people we are kicking in the face as to justify that dangerous exercise. Where shall we look for these?

Unfortunately, it appears at once that in this respect nature or fate or destiny or whatever decides these things has had but too little sympathy with Nordic aspirations. It appears that the Nordic tribe has had no monopoly of great deeds or of great men. Intelligence, mind, skill, genius, the creative power, goodness, and worth have been manifested quite indifferently in all inhabited regions and among all peoples. Where exclusive preëminence has seemed to show, it resolves itself on examination chiefly into vehemence of assertion and persistence of iteration. The press agent seems to have made more geniuses than the Almighty. There is probably no so-called race on the face of the earth that has not had its great men. One of our pleasing hallucinations is to believe, and one of our most exasperating practices is to proclaim, that we Nordics have superior mentality. So far as the records inform us, the whole Nordic outfit from John o' Groat's to the Bluff has never produced a mind as swift, sure, varied in brilliant endowment, or powerful in efficiency as the mind of José Rizal, ignored Filipino. This is no place to cite more than two or three examples from thousands, but it is likely that we have never produced a philosopher as great as Lao-tsze, a political thinker equal to Mazzini, an administrator as remarkable as Toussaint Louverture, a genius as great and as many-sided as Vinci. If we know that men of unusual parts have appeared in all regions of the world,

it is obvious that other men equally gifted must have developed of whom there is no record, and quite as obvious that for any household in this vast family to boast of exclusive possessions in intellect is a ridiculous and intolerable egotism. It has no more foundation than the notion that "crazy, lazy Italians" do nothing but idle.

At the feet of Dante, Michelangelo, and Victor Hugo we may well be reticent about our superiority.

Culture moves from the east; we have undertaken to make the sun rise in the west. Our civilization, what there is of it, is nothing but the Roman Empire, in turn a magnified reflection from Greece. Into the Cimbrian brain it was driven on a Grecian spear and a Roman javelin. The countries that taught us and formed us we now declare to be too degraded for our select society. What a pretty thing is Congress when it goes in its shirt and trousers and leaves off its wit!

Some of us, having a wholesome remembrance of our sorry achievements in art and in the kindlier pursuits of life, have found or tried to find refuge in the assertion that we Nordics discovered morality, invented the decalogue, have cornered all the honesty in the world, and above all are the original and only light-bearers of liberty and democracy. "The mother of parliaments," we have called the Nordic country that adopted a parliament long after it had become an institution elsewhere. "The great Anglo-Saxon ideals of liberty," we say, as if but for us the rest of mankind would be wallowing in slavery. As a matter of



fact, liberty was shouted in the streets of Rome when our ancestors were half-naked savages running about the woods and climbing trees. In our schools we now make much of the two-cent English Revolution of 1688 as the grand event in the history of human emancipation. It is fortunate that the open-mouthed upon whom we impress this preposterous nonsense never read the story of the Italian revolution and know but vaguely the significance of the Bastille. "The Anglo-Saxon mission," we say with up-cast eyes, "is to spread the blessings of liberty and light." And then silently arise the figures of India, Ireland, Egypt, the Philippines, Haiti, and in the lips of the loudest shouting Nordic chauvin the chorus goes halt.

Nothing is so easy as for insularity to deceive itself into pleasant dreams of a peculiar grace and a divine warrant for dominion. The trouble is, first, that the propaganda so sweetly persuasive to us cannot make the rest of the world believe in a manifest absurdity; and, second, that aliens resent the Anglo-Saxon habit of viewing them as dirt and door-mats. We utterly refute our own grandiose estimate of our intelligence when we assume that other men will submit to our gross impostures. If we have any of that better honesty that we so smugly profess and that is otherwise undiscoverable, we shall do well to admit the facts. The distinction of the Nordic peoples is in acquisition and in mere possession; so far that is all. In a world where the only real progress is and must be toward the submersion of the material and the triumph of the spiritual, to say that this badge of all our tribe entitles us

to rule sounds like babble from the nursery.

True enough, as we Nordics have pursued our way through the world shooting up brown men and black, we have sought to give to our adventures in banditry some camouflage of sanctity. In defiance of our covenants we continue to hold the Philippines, but not for the sake of the millions of profits we annually draw from the enforced holding of an unwilling people. It is for the sake of their souls, the poor benighted creatures. We must teach them self-government—after the manner of Chicago, maybe, or of Herrin. The British do not hold India for the sake of that wondrous pump of gold that annually draws up India's wealth and deposits it upon British shores. Not at all, but only to preserve order in India and teach the lowly heathen the beauties of the Christian religion—as at Amritsar. When the British clamp to their empire the whole of the Sudan it is not because of the cotton they expect to grow there but to install civilization—and liberty! When we go to Haiti and dispossess its people of their country it is not to enable American investors to rewrite for their own benefit the Haitian constitution, but because the Haitians, or some of them, follow voodooism, and we must wean them from that horrible practice—substituting vivisection. When without the act or the knowledge of Congress we seize and annex Nicaragua it is not to enable an American bank to collect on its bonds but to establish order and show the Nicaraguans how to enforce the law—as we enforce prohibition.

Wherever in this world may wave

the flag of imperialism, become now a Nordic ensign, the organ plays, the sounds of orisons arise, and the throat-cutting and till-tapping proceed to the strains of the doxology.

Meantime it must be painfully apparent to the most rabid Anglo-Saxon that our efforts to do the heathen good (in both senses) always lack appreciation from the recipients of the priceless Nordic bounty. After one hundred and seventy years of British blessings showered upon India the ungrateful people there are in a state of revolt. After forty years of the best quality of Nordic benevolence the Egyptians were so resentful of it that the British were compelled to pretend to withdraw. For twenty-six years we have been teaching the Filipinos how to be good and yield us much profits, and now the graceless things are plotting to throw us out at the first opportunity and be rid of us, right in the face of all our unctuous morality—and guns. Even the shots that the British police fired into the Shanghai college students did not seem to do the survivors a particle of good. The next day they were still uncompromising in their refusal to have good done to them—after the historic fashion of the Alambagh.

It appears, therefore, that the Nordic conception of good and of life is so repulsive to other peoples that it can be imposed upon them only with force and much shooting.

In reality, this is the doctrine we accepted and indorsed when we passed our extraordinary immigration act, declared the United States to be Nordic, and wantonly insulted most of the nations outside of one narrowly drawn circle.

Step by step our progression to this astounding position has been watched by them with full understanding of the consequences. The English-speaking peoples have not been drawn into a combination for imperialistic dominion much more rapidly than the Latin nations have been driven into a counter-combination for defense against this menace. Every gesture of the English-Speaking Union has had its repercussion in the Latin Alliance. What else could discerning men expect? It is an old-time insular theory that all people of other than the English tongue are fools or knaves. Under the Nordic threat the Latins have disproved the first term of this formula, certainly. They knew at once that the mere mention or suggestion of a union of English-speaking peoples must mean two things: first, that other peoples are inferior; second, that other peoples are to be subjugated. Other peoples do not wish to be subjugated. Most of them won their freedom by such heroic efforts as shine forever in the history we complacently ignore. In our brutally intolerant way we have assumed an exclusive possession of the love of liberty. We are now likely to learn that other peoples have at least as much of it and will not willingly accept oppression, whether from holy Nordics or sources less sanctified.

When an English-Speaking Unionist responds to this with his favorite slogan that "England and the United States together can lick the world," we may as well begin to get our war tools ready, for assuredly we shall need them.

Day by day the signs of irritation

multiply on both sides of the deplorable line we have drawn. Day by day the Latin bond becomes stronger as day by day the Anglo-Saxon pact becomes more certain and the peril grows of aggression from the new candidates for world power. Great Britain has lost a great part of her South American trade of former years. This is the reason. All South America turns daily more and more to Latin Europe for commerce, for sympathy, for inspiration, for alliance. This is the reason. Once South America looked with confidence and affection to North America; now it thinks of North America with suspicion and dread. This is the reason. Once South America hailed the Monroe Doctrine as a rampart of freedom and built monuments to its author; now South America thinks the Monroe Doctrine a stalking-horse for new tricks by the new imperialism and wants to have that doctrine abolished. This is the reason.

How long shall we try to fool ourselves about these things? Our boshy talk of Nordic supremacy and our open partnership in the vast and dizzy schemes of commercial imperialism have aroused the strongest antagonism of peoples that otherwise would have been brought into amicable accord. When the fear and hatred we are breeding are ripe and the shots begin to fly, it is to be hoped we may remember the steps by which we came to the debacle.

The new immigration law reversed an invariable American policy, overturned American tradition, gave the lie to the Declaration of Independence. That such a law could be rushed through without the mandate

of the people, and virtually without their understanding, is a sinister comment on the state we have reached. It is not only un-American; it is unscientific and untrue. It assumes that there are among peoples essential, inherent, and important racial differences. There are no such differences. The whole notion that any part of the human family is in and of itself better than others, or hopelessly different from them, is the fantastic invention of ignorant vanity. The notion that God has set apart one division of his children to ride upon the necks of others is the red-hued sign of historic horrors. Where one people differs from another it differs because of differences in opportunity and not because of mysterious chemistries of blood, brain, bone, tissue, pigment, liver, lights, or aught else.

Toward the recognition of this truth, the only basis upon which there can be peace in this world, mankind was slowly approaching when there was loosed upon it this madhouse reversion to race of which the English-Speaking Union and the Ku Klux Klan are equal manifestations and equally pestilent. Up to that time the convincing illustration of the essential oneness of earth's children was the United States, toward all the friend, offering to all the equal welcome. Its one apparent exception, the case of the Chinese laborer, was purely economic, never racial. With the present immigration law the United States abandoned all of its position of almost inconceivable power and prestige as the moral leader of the world, the bearer of good-will, the international democrat, and suddenly assumed the



rôle of the extreme racial bigot, the frenetic imperialist, the reckless exploiter.

Of this surrender of our ideals the immediate terms were sufficiently astonishing, but what made other nations gasp was a clause (added to the bill as a rider) meaning, or seeming to mean, that after July 1, 1927, three in every five immigrants admitted to the United States must come from the British Islands or from the North of Ireland. It is true that on February 2, 1927, the Senate, apparently in some fright, passed a bill that would suspend for twelve months the operation of this lunatic act, but the harm had been done. The world had been notified that the United States spurned all peoples except those that spoke the English language. In effect, and so far as Congress could say so, the United States had decided to become a part of the British Empire. For the first time in history a great and powerful nation had deliberately resolved to end its own independent existence and be absorbed into another. If the threat of an Anglo-Saxon domination had been alarming before, it now became to all the rest of the earth a peril imminent and overawing.

On its own spiritual and cultural interests, aside from its political autonomy, America seemed with that act to have wrought another kind of self-destruction. It now frankly committed itself to the materialistic conception of human society. The only substance of imperialism is aggression and aggrandizement. Yet if human experience has shown anything it has shown these two pertinent facts: first, that aggrandize-

ment, for men or for nations, is induration, and induration is deadly to the life of the spirit; and, second, that the road to empire is the road to the pit. Lean over the edge of that historic abyss and look at the fragments, preserved for man's instruction. No nation venturing upon that path has missed the smash. Why should we wish to pile up with the others?

If we must needs destroy ourselves let us do it in a more convenient way.

There is still another consideration. Without disparaging the glories of the Nordic triumphs in grabbing and hoarding, we are still to deal with those gentler aspects of civilized man's life that distinguish him from the savage. In their light, it will not be denied, the Nordic showing is not impressive. He appears far more recent, far less developed. Generally speaking, the Latin has an instinctive, intuitive, and inevitable sense of and for art; the Nordic has no such trait, being too young and too near the woods. To the Latin, art is the natural and unpremeditated expression of his soul; to the Nordic, if anything, it is undertaken at will and as duty. Having as yet for all the arts but little instinct, the Nordic has least of all for the art of living, the art of extracting from the span of human existence something more than toil and worry. The Latin seeks to live; the Nordic to seize (and blindly and uselessly to store) the material means of living. By large infusions of Latin blood we were beginning in this country to remedy that grave defect. We had begun to take on some aptitude for this and all the other arts. For

example, in himself and normally the typical Nordic has as much sense of music as a cow. With Latin and other good aid we had begun to overcome this handicap and develop here a great musical foundation. At one blow we separate ourselves from the people in whom music is inborn and perennial, we revert to the Nordic ideal of life as all sordid struggle and bootless strife.

"Crazy, lazy Italians," said the Nordic woman. Are we so sure of that? What if one should say that the man lying on the sea-wall and looking at Naples Bay that morning had more joy than the rest of us ever knew, more joy and a deeper draft of life than he could have had from any drudging labor, more joy than all the tribe of American millionaires together ever had? The Nordic would be shocked and incensed. Yet who that has considered both sides of this question and is honest could fail to

vote for the man on the wall? In any rational view of life, was he not the richer?

A carter goes along the road from Palermo singing an aria from the opera he heard last night (for ten cents)—singing and looking at the clouds floating above Monreale. An American business man hurtles to work, his heart heavy with cares, his mind delving after ways to outwit his fellows.

Look for a moment upon life as something to yield joy, fruitage of satisfaction, the happiness that can come only from the sense of inward and spiritual exaltation; and which has the best of it, carter or money-grubber?

We have cast our lot on the side of the money-grubbing ideal, which is to say, on the side of materialism, which is to say, on the side of imperialism.

Have we done well?

## MELTING SNOW

GRACE STRICKLER DAWSON

Across this open space where, frayed and tattered,  
Lies Winter's drabbed shawl in disarray,  
Discarded hastily, as though it mattered  
Nothing at all since Winter could not stay—

Some one walks daintily in cool green sandals,  
Wearing a scarf of filmy yellow light  
Tangled with mist, some one who deftly handles  
With coaxing finger-tips the ragged white  
Fringes, and brushing all of them from sight,  
Lights one by one the dandelion candles.