

THE LOGIC AND PASSIONS OF WAR

[THOUGHTS AND PROPHECIES]

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First Article

THE company around the dinner table at the club comprised only eminent intellectuals: men of letters, professors at the university, an engineer, a canon. The conversation rolled about the war. What else should intellectuals at present talk about? All the diners were enthusiasts of the war. It must be said that the scene passed in a neutral capital. All but one, who differed, a meek pacifist. While the others exalted the heroism of the soldiers, the firmness of the chiefs, the stoicism, gallantry, and contempt of death of the airmen and mariners, the ingenuity of the governments in discovering ever new, and seemingly inexhaustible, resources, he timidly objected that war, on the whole, was a barbarism, and that, quite apart from the bloodshed, the wholesale destruction, the reign of violence and terror, mankind had entirely lost nearly three years during which the human mind had everywhere ceased working. Since the summer of 1914, nothing had been produced anywhere, not a single creation of art, of literature, of philosophy with a pretension to lasting value, not a single scientific discovery advancing our knowledge of nature, not a single invention ameliorating our conditions of life.

He had a fine success. From all sides violent protests were raised. The philosopher crushed him with a sweeping generalization. His assertion was entirely unfounded; but even if it were true, it would not signify anything; for what are three years in the evolution of mankind, which counted by hundreds of centuries?

"What?" asked the author hotly. "The brains have idled during three years of war? Just the opposite. They were more active than ever. The number of books published passes

by far that of peace time—20,000 volumes in the various countries. True, they are mostly assemblages of newspaper articles, but they are literature all the same.”

The art critic cut in: “Neither have the artists stopped work. And what noble subjects they treat! Their themes magnify them. They do not paint any more three oysters and a bottle of Chablis or a tree of broomstick shape in a square spot of spinage green, they do not mould a ridiculous bust or a twisted female. They glorify their country, sacrifice, heroism. Look at the drawings published by the papers.”

“Caricatures,” interrupted the pacifist.

“If you like—how witty, how vehement, how mordant they are! Look at the exhibitions of sketches from the trenches, at the portraits fixing historic figures, at the allegories expressing elevated thoughts, at the first drafts of future monuments of the victories which are to be gained—does not all this bear witness to an exceptional intensity of creative impulsions? The events of these last three years have prodigiously recundated the artistic genius of mankind.”

“And science,” the clinical professor held forth sententiously, “did not lag behind art and literature. What fine achievements have we not to register almost every day! Dr. Weinberg, of the Paris Pasteur Institute, has found a serum which gives promise to cure perhaps gaseous gangrene——”

“Which is scarcely ever observed in peace time,” the pacifist ventured to object.

“That does not matter,” continued the professor with authority; “the merit remains the same. Dr. Berillon, the eminent neurologist, has discovered the Bromohydrose of the Germans, that strange infirmity which causes the unhappy Teutons to exhale permanently a foul and nauseous stench, a remarkable anthropological peculiarity of the race. Dr. Carrel, the great surgeon and physiologist of the Rockefeller Institute of New York, has shown that the most efficient disinfectant is a solution of hypochloride of lime. It is true that this salt had been employed for the same use already some

seventy years ago, that in fact it was the first in date of all the antiseptics, prior to carbolic acid, to sublimate, to thymol, but this does not diminish the value of Dr. Carrel's find. The re-discovery of a scientific fact lapsed into oblivion may have the same importance as a new discovery. Dr. Michaelis, the excellent Berlin psychiatrist, has demonstrated that the hunger which people in Germany feel, or believe they feel, is in reality nothing but a psychosis, that is to say a delusion, a morbid imagination, a kind of delirium produced by exceptional circumstances. Consequently, according to my illustrious Berlin colleague, hunger does not exist. It is merely a symptom of a mental trouble. It is unnecessary to give the patient to eat, as the non-expert would undoubtedly propose; it suffices to treat him with the methods that are used in these cases. Instead of bread and meat, which there may be some difficulty in procuring, shower baths, bathing, if need be the strait jacket. How greatly this simplifies the problem of the feeding of the people! It is a discovery of huge economical moment."

"The labors of pure and applied science," completed the professor of chemistry, "place themselves worthily on the same level with those of medicine, of which my colleague has given you some striking instances. In these last three years we have learnt to know the heavy suffocating gases on the basis of chlorin and of bromine which may be sent off to a distance of several miles without special pipage, just as if they were liquids, powders or solid bodies, a quite remarkable performance."

"For inflicting a particularly cruel and awful death," sighed the pacifist.

"That is secondary," replied the professor without pausing, "and all those new combinations that have been realized as a substitution for substances having become scarce or totally wanting! There are true flashes of genius among them. This butter made of scented and dyed potato flour, this oil extracted from sewer water, this leather composed of old newspapers, these sausages of sawdust jelly filled in a skin of soluble paper, these jams without fruit nor sugar, but tast-

ing deliciously, we are told, greatly honor the scientists who have conceived and realized them."

"Is it necessary," added the engineer, "to remind you of the numerous and important inventions which have of recent enriched the technology? Only three years ago, aircrafts carried just two aviators. Now they are armed with machine guns and bear hundreds of pounds of explosives. The Zeppelins could hold 12 to 15 persons at most; now they travel with a crew of 30 to 40 men, with only pieces of artillery, and with tons of shells. Not to speak of the submarines, which in 1914 were nut-shells easily to tread open with a kick. They might sail a distance of 100 or 150 miles, remain out at sea perhaps 24 hours, and plunge 10 yards at most. At present they are vessels of 2,000 or 3,000 tons, armed with big guns, running with the speed of a transatlantic liner, remaining for weeks on the main, skimming the oceans to their whole extent, not afraid of depths of 30 yards. And those tanks, those automatic rifles, those guns of twenty miles range—they are marvels revealing the genius of mankind."

All the table-companions agreed that the war years, far from being barren, must be counted among the most fruitful of the history of civilization. In the presence of this unanimity the pacifist broke down. But it was left to the canon to deal him the finishing blow.

"And the most beautiful in this magnificent effort of the human mind," said the saintly gentleman, turning his eyes heavenward, "is the fact that it is a work of love."

"Of love?" gasped the pacifist.

"Certainly, of love of the country."

LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS BECAUSE OF THIS "WORK OF LOVE"

I do not know if an American reader can form a clear conception of the present aspect of Europe. Of course, about the battlefields and the ruined towns and villages everything worth knowing has been learned from the papers. Illustrated periodicals and picture cards have made everybody familiar with the sight of the remains of Louvain and the Rheims Cathedral, of the woods turned into match wood and of the fields

transformed into a sieve by shell holes. The bread and potato tickets of Germany, the sugar tickets of France, the meatless days everywhere, are likewise well known. But I doubt if it is easy or at all possible at a distance to form a true conception of the details of an average European's existence during the war years.

In belligerent countries life is almost unbearable. This is what might be expected. It requires the whole stoic philosophy and unbounded patriotism to make it endurable, and even they are scarcely sufficient to palliate the hardships of the day. Conditions in England and Germany I know only from published descriptions, but of those prevailing in France I have personal experience or direct information. The stranger who makes a passing stay in a Paris hotel will note no great difference from normal times. His bill is somewhat greater, but he does not lack anything. His meals are just as complete and abundant as ever; the heating and lighting of the rooms leave nothing to be desired; in the streets he finds tramcars and autos; he has a choice of theatres, music halls and moving picture shows; even some departments of the Louvre Museum are open to the visitor. The inhabitant, however, feels the pinch of the war in every limb. All his friends mourn a death, are in anguish for some one wounded, or yearn and fear for an absentee.

There is general dearth, and many things are beyond reach. Letters, post cards, railway tickets, cost one half more than before the war. Many trains are suspended, all have their speed reduced. Traveling requires the accomplishing of endless formalities and documents that are not always obtainable. Passing the frontier is only possible with a passport which often as not is refused. With many countries there is no postal communication whatever; with all of them it is slow and insecure. The censor opens every letter and confiscates many. The exchange of commodities is suppressed. One must put up with local production and renounce much that one is used to. Caviar and ginger must be dispensed with; certain German drugs much less so. German books are stopped at the frontier. It is impossible

to follow the literary movement in the enemy country. Necessary articles are entirely missing. Coal can hardly be procured. Gas and electricity are scantily meted out. Street lighting is reduced; at nine o'clock in the evening it is extinguished and the town is plunged in darkness unless the moon consents to do duty. Shops are closed at six, cafés and restaurants partly at eight, others at nine. Theatres have their street fronts shrouded in obscurity and the house half murky, in part as a precaution against airships, in part to save coal. You cannot have servant girls. They find a better paying occupation in the ammunition factories. Stocks and securities can be sold at exchange after innumerable difficulties only. You have to prove that you are a native of the country and that you have purchased them, be it fifty years ago, through a French broker. Without this justification they are worthless scraps of paper.

In the neutral countries of Europe life is not quite so difficult as in those at war, but sufficiently hard. The import of wares has ceased, international traffic is practically at a standstill, black-lists outlaw merchants in one or the other half of Europe. This part of the world has become a museum of the history of civilization where different periods of the past revive thrillingly. One lives here every epoch from the first to the tenth or twelfth century of our era. Julius Cæsar relates of the Gauls of his time, that they were in the habit of detaining on the road the infrequent travelers who visited their country and of interrogating them searchingly about the news of their native land before they allowed them to proceed on their journey. This is the treatment the stranger is actually subjected to on every frontier, only that the examination is conducted without kindness. At the time of the Crusades there was no lighting of streets in the towns, the good people went to rest at sunset and risked themselves out of doors during nightly hours only in extreme cases, with a lantern or torches. They were armed to the teeth and well escorted. A regular post did not exist. At long intervals messengers carried a letter from town to town or from one country to the other. Traveling was most un-

usual. People lived and died where they were born. If someone left his dwelling place he made his will and bade his relatives and friends good-bye for life and death. Of the absent one scarcely ever was any intelligence received. He had vanished. If a letter reached him the reply arrived perhaps years afterwards and produced the effect of a message from the other world. Outlandish wares seemed something rare, almost wonderful. The coffee of Arabia, the pepper of India were fabulous goods, surrounded with legends and romance like the phoenix bird and the unicorn.

Well, then: this is the life Europe is at present living. And now imagine the sudden scene-shifting at the conclusion of peace! The deserted fairs are attended again; the empty shops are filled; if you want anything you just go there and buy it, without a ticket or a special permit; your money is sufficient. In the evening and at night you light as you like. The street lamps are ablaze. The autobusses ply. The papers talk of science, art and literature. Families are united. No one remains weeks or months without news from a beloved being. No one trembles for the health, for the life of the absent. Fatal messages are not constantly received that stun, that knock down like a blow on the head with a club.

The theatres perform, concerts take place, art exhibitions open their doors, museums again admit visitors and students. The post is working and distributes regularly a correspondence which is not opened by different censors nor stupidly confiscated by high-handed, irresponsible officials, sunk to the bottom of the sea nor retained in some nook or corner for weeks or months. It is possible to exchange news and ideas and to enter into communication with friends at a distance. The telegraph office accepts telegrams and even sends them off, while at present it takes the money charged for them and suppresses the wire messages. One enjoys a freedom of movement of which the very memory had been lost. One is at liberty to travel, to visit foreign countries, to pass frontiers without being obliged to beg a passport, which grim officials refuse according to their good pleasures,

without being suspected, bullied, threatened, hunted, ill-treated. In short, one understands, one feels that one is no longer a caged brute prodded and whipped by armed tamers, but is restored again to the dignity of a human being, heir to, and usufructuary of goods created and hoarded by a hundred thousand years of work on the part of his ancestors.

If the generation that will have lived these years, endured these experiences, gone through the sensations of waking up from this abominable nightmare, is capable of beginning a new war, it will prove that it is indeed a stupid and ferocious species of beast greatly inferior to the stone age man who had at least the excuse of ignorance.

IN AMERICA IGNORANCE IS NO LONGER AN EXCUSE

President Wilson's veto of the Immigration Bill containing the "illiteracy test" confirms America's ideals after the war. He is the third president who, judiciously and justly acts in this manner. The illiteracy clause remains incomprehensible to common sense. It prescribes that all aliens incapable to read and write a short text in one of the languages of their country of origin are to be forbidden to enter the United States.

Why?

What prejudice is feared for the community from illiteracy?

Is it created to see that the culture level of the American people is not lowered? This could not possibly be brought about. Even if all the illiterates of Europe, or, for that matter, of the whole white race liable to abandon their homes were to come to America, they would weigh as nothing in the balance against some 112 millions of cultivated Americans.

Does the legislator mean to place on a par ignorance and crime, insanity or disease?

This would be absurd. Illiteracy does not threaten the community in the same manner as delinquency and madness. Ignorance is not contagious like trachoma.

Is it feared that his lack of culture will impede the

illiterate in making his way in America? This may confidently be left to his own care. He will soon feel where the shoe pinches. He is the first interested in securing for himself a place in American society.

Against whom is the immigration bill directed?

Not against the English, the French, the Germans, the Scandinavians, the Dutch, who constitute the ground-wasp of the American nationality. It is leveled against the natives of Southern and Southeastern Europe, and against the subjects of the Ottoman Empire. It would shut out a certain number of South-Italians, Slovaks, Syrians, Poles and principally Russian Jews. Yet each of these elements has its merits. The peasants of the Abruzzi, the Neapolitans, the Sicilians, have created the wealth of Argentina; the magnificent economical rise of the River Plate country is to a great extent due to their work. The Hungarian Slovaks render sterling service in the American mines. It is a well-known fact that Syrians, Armenians, Greeks of Turkey do splendidly in the United States and attain fortune and position. The diverse populations of Russia distinguish themselves by their laboriousness; they are in great request as labor-hands and monopolize important branches of national industry. All these peoples, with little exception, perhaps with none, are highly gifted by nature, keen of mind, thirsting for instruction.

What will the American legislator punish them for? Is it for their ignorance?

It is no fault of theirs. It is their misfortune. They have learnt nothing in their country because they had no opportunity for it there. They did not lack will, but schools. Their home lands are backward. The state there does not provide or provides insufficiently, for the instruction of the young. How cruel to make them pay for the neglect of their government to accomplish its most elementary duty!

The case of the Russian Jews troubles me most. It is the one I am best acquainted with. It appears that the illiteracy clause is principally pointed at them. This is incomprehensible. Possibly they know neither Russian nor Polish.

But why examine them in these languages? They are the official languages of their birth country, they are not their languages. They have a language of their own: Yiddish. The character of this language is revealed in its speech. It is contemptuously corrupt German interspersed with Hebrew elements and vocables borrowed from the idioms of the Slav surroundings of the Jews who use it. But all modern Roman languages, French, Italian, Spanish, actually the noblest means of expression of the white race, have originally been corrupt Latin; they have been formed exactly in the same manner as Yiddish, by the incorporation of words, grammatical forms and idioms from the languages of the peoples that had adopted the Latin of the Roman camps, and centuries after the downfall of the Roman Empire, the neo-Latin popular speech had still been so much felt as a jargon, that in the 13th century Dante thought it necessary to excuse himself for having written his "Divine Comedy" in "vulgar vernacular"; that is in that magnificent Italian which we now admire as classic. An idiom spoken as mother tongue and familiar parlance by more than seven millions of men, if the Galician, Bukowinian, North-Hungarian and Rumanian Jews are counted with the Polish and Russian, is a genuine, full-valued language which nobody ought to be ashamed to own; it is not a jargon.

What is to be considered as the test of a language? Its diffusion? Yiddish is spoken by twelve times as many people as Rhaeto-Romansh, seven times as many as Albanese, double as many as Danish and Norwegian together, as many as Dutch. All these are recognized, classified languages. Why not Yiddish? Or is the dignity of an idiom to be determined by its development and use? Yiddish possesses a great literature, the history of which has been written by Professor Leo Wiener. It has been employed by authors of high standing, by Morris who is compared with Heine, by Frug who vies with the best Russian lyrical poets, Sholem Aleichem, Mendele Mokher Sphorim, who are called the Yiddish Maupassant, Dickens and Mark Twain. A human speech used by great poets, fiction writers, essayists, in which appear

thousands of books, which boast of big, thriving theatres and of an ultra-modern, most lively press with daily papers circulated in hundreds of thousands of copies, is a means by which may be acquired scientific, æsthetic and moral accomplishment second to the average culture of none of the European nations.

If Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe are subjected to the literacy test in Yiddish, they have nothing to fear. There is hardly one adult among them incapable of reading and writing the language. In South Africa this test is admitted, and until now no case has been registered of a Jew being rejected for his failing to stand it.

To be sure, if the Ellis Island authorities will not acknowledge Yiddish as a language, and require Russian Jews to be conversant with Polish or Russian in reading and writing, many of them will have to give up the hope to tread the yearned-after soil of America. But why are these languages unfamiliar to them? Because the Russian authorities have for centuries precluded them systematically from intercourse with their Christian countrymen, pen them up in their pale of settlement, shut them out from the public schools, forbid them expressly the teaching of the vernacular in their own schools, in one word strip them forcibly of every opportunity of acquiring the language of their non-Jewish surroundings in the natural way, by association and public instruction.

Mr. Wilson followed the best American tradition when he refused to thrust back into barbarism men striving to lift themselves from barbarism to culture. America's part has ever been to raise, not to weigh down. In her hundred and forty years' history America has always been a great educator for freedom and enlightenment. Narrow, bigoted minds seem inclined to forget this. It is comforting that the president opportunely reminded them of it.

AT THE GATE OF THE WAR

CAPTAIN NISHAN DER-HAGOPIAN

*[Written on the battlefield at Van, Armenia, on the eve of battle,
July 4, 1915]*

HARD the war may be for me,
Rough the trail that I must keep;
Toil is dreary, and the strife
Wages fierce through shadows deep.
Little Dreamer of my life,
Where the action is the quickest
I must be—in honor bound;
Where the conflict rages thickest.
Nothing daunted, dear, I go;
Sunshine golden still remains,
Valor gleams like drifted snow—
Flash of roses in my veins.
Visions of your violet eyes
Stirring to high enterprise,
Glowing with a fire divine
In every act my soul describes.
Though the fight be ever long,
Will my love be pure and strong.

When the smokes of battle thicken,
Sweetheart, hear the weary cry—
Afterwail of shrapnel shrilling
O'er a dim and starless sky.
In the spirit then be near me,
Let me feel you at my side,
Step by step advancing with me
Where the wingéd horrors ride.
Little dreamer, when released,
Life or death be mine, I know . . .
I will follow in your lead
Where the New World zephyrs blow,
Where sweet blossoms deck the air
And our hopes and dreams come true;
I will work for endless years
For the joy of loving you—
For the blessings and the gain
When the land has peaceful reign.