

THE TRIAL OF THE KAISER

MR. LLOYD GEORGE went to Paris bent upon 'hanging the Kaiser' (this is the unofficial way of referring to the business by most people when they are not sitting on commissions) because he had just snatched a victory at the polls from a public blackguarded into a thoroughly un-English temper by a press which is rapidly becoming the worst in the world. The point has been carried in Paris by dint of irrelevant appeals to the crime of 1914, and opposition has been silenced whenever it has lifted its head by violent suggestions that anyone who does not want to 'hang the Kaiser' condones the violation by Germany of the treaties of 1839, and is not fully alive to the enormity of the offenses of the late German Empire. And now London is to be the seat of the trial and an initial touch of absurdity has already been given to the whole process by the decision to consign our prisoner (when we get him) to the Tower, to be guarded (presumably) by Beef-eaters. The idealists, who want to begin a new era in which international treaties shall be sacred, propose to bring it about in the first instance by reviving the fee-faw-fum traditions of an edifice which has become a museum of horrid mediæval antiquities.

From the broad international point of view, a worse fate is likely to overtake these proceedings than the ridicule which they seem ultimately bound to provoke. The English nation has not only a sense of humor, it has also, to a fault, a sense of chivalry, of the futility of punishment after victory, of compassion for anyone in misfortune (whether by his own fault or another's) which will speedily declare

itself when this international tribunal gets to work.

For a real explanation of the proposal to try the Kaiser, an explanation which really covers the facts, we must look back, beyond the middle ages, to the primitive tribes studied by Sir J. G. Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. We commend the judges who will be deputed to try the Kaiser when, as is bound to happen, they are graveled for lack of precedent, to study the primitive customs which cluster round the tradition of the scapegoat. The Kaiser is to be made with all due rites and ceremonies the scapegoat of the war. The Prussian traditions and the Prussian people were the authors of the war. William of Hohenzollern was a mere straw upon the wind. He was dangerous only in the sense that any impressionable person of histrionic ability is dangerous if he is put into the midst of powerful and mischievous political and social forces. The Allied statesmen who made the peace know this so well that they have not dared, even though William II is a discredited exile, to leave the real Prussian military régime the smallest chance of recovery, even though the new Germany has become outwardly as democratic as she safely can be. The Allied statesmen do not believe that in punishing William they are really cutting off the offense of Prussia at the root. They talk only of the moral effect of the trial. That effect will, in our opinion, be disastrous. To begin with, we doubt whether the proceedings can be conducted with any sort of dignity. The days of Westminster Hall and Warren Hastings are over. The Allies who wholly failed to make the recent

proceedings in the Hall of Mirrors dignified or impressive cannot hope to make the trial of the Kaiser anything but a fashionable spectacle. Even if they contrive to keep out the *matinée* hat, they will be compelled to keep in the descriptive reporter who will vulgarize every incident and describe with great particularity and his customary genius for getting things wrong every incident which strikes him as likely to appeal to the least fastidious of Lord Northcliffe's constant readers.

The practical result of the trial, in England at least, will almost certainly be twofold. A certain simple section of the public, having hung or banished the Kaiser, will consider that the quarrel between ourselves and Germany is thereby closed, and in the English fashion will be the more disposed to shake hands. A less simple section of the public, for whom hanging the Kaiser is neither here nor there, will be instinctively repelled by the whole affair and fall into a perfectly natural sympathy for Germany the victim. The worst crimes are to some extent condoned by misfortune. No surer means of raising sympathy for the new Germany could well be devised than by making a public exhibition of the calamity which has overtaken her.

The irony of the whole affair lies in making London the seat and centre of these proceedings, for in England the effect will be worse for those who are responsible than in any other European country. In assenting to such an

arrangement, Mr. Lloyd George has made a mistake to which lately he has been too prone. He has assumed that the English press speaks the English mind. It is an anomaly of the English character that the English public will support a press and often acquiesce in policies and speeches which fall habitually beneath the generosity and intelligence of the average Englishman. We should have little hope of our country if we thought that half of what is said to-day in the House of Commons or a tenth of what appears in public print had the heart and mind of England behind it. Unfortunately, the English are not by nature articulate and it has become a habit with them to leave their speaking and writing to professional speakers and writers who are usually louder and more ubiquitous in proportion as they are out of touch with the genuine and unalterable English temper. For five years the English have had to fight with brutes, but they have not been brutalized. The war has brutalized our politics and our newspapers, but the destinies of England ultimately lie in the hands of the decent and chivalrous Englishmen, still to be found in every rank of the community, who will one day find a leader and someone to speak for them upon the old English level.

Meanwhile, the vulgarians are claiming the pastimes they deserve, one of which is the game shortly to be played in London, playfully described over the dinner tables as hanging the Kaiser.

The Saturday Review

THE CHOICE: A FANTASY

BY RICHARD BUXTON

A LITTLE while ago, after a troublesome day, I went to bed and to sleep; and either Morpheus or my Subconscious Self (by kind permission of Dr. Freud, of Vienna), proceeded to enact within my sleeping brain an entirely new and original dream.

I dreamed that I was sitting at breakfast and, as is my usual custom at that meal, reading the letters from retired admirals, ex-Lord Mayors, and others which are printed by the *Times* in somewhat smaller type than the rest of the paper. I should explain that I do not find this occupation amusing. I perform it as my daily act of charity, for which, I believe, I shall be rewarded. I thought at first, indeed, in this dream of which I am telling you, that my reward had actually arrived; for I looked up suddenly to see an angel standing at my right hand. The angel said, however, with some solemnity:

‘I am directed to inform you that your period of life is at an end and that you must come with me.’

I own to having been considerably surprised by this; and I remember that my hand, jarred by the sudden mental agitation, shook the teapot, which was poised over the cup, and poured a stream of tea upon the tablecloth. As I strove to mop up the flood with the blue silk handkerchief which I wear in my breast-pocket on Mondays and Thursdays (this was a Thursday), I asked the angel, with as much composure as I had at my command, to repeat what he had said.

‘Time’s up,’ he replied, with sudden asperity; and then, with a nullification of his tone, he went on. ‘Sorry if I snapped at you. But you can’t imagine how tired I get when people ask me

to say it again. They all do it; and yet I’m sure that I speak perfectly distinctly.’

‘Do you mean at once?’ I asked him, preparing to rise. But he waved me down again with a negligent though courteous gesture.

‘No, no,’ he said. ‘There’s no immediate hurry. Take your own time and by all means finish your breakfast.’ I thanked him and suggested that I should have a place laid for him, which he declined. He then sat gracefully on the arm of a chair and smoked a cigarette which I gave him while I went on with my meal.

As the kidneys were grilled to a turn and as I did not know whether I should ever see any again, I made no haste and practised no abstemiousness; but when I had done the angel showed no sign of desiring to take an instant departure. He merely lolled further back into the seat of the chair and said:

‘Of course, I’m taking you to Paradise first but, you know, there are certain formalities.’ Here he hesitated a little and looked at me as if for help.

‘I quite understand,’ I said, encouragingly.

‘Well,’ he went on, ‘your name has been on the waiting list for quite a while now, and you have been recommended by some really influential persons, but, of course, that does n’t say——’

‘No, no,’ I murmured, heartened by even this recognition of my quality and convinced already that the formalities of which the angel spoke were not likely to trouble me.

‘What I mean,’ he pursued, ‘is that you’d better take something with you for Peter to look at. It’s his business really.’

‘How do you mean, exactly?’ I asked.

‘Well, something to show for what