

SHAKESPEARE'S PATRIOTISM

BY FRANK HARRIS

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I HAVE seen in English prints recently a dozen allusions to Shakespeare's patriotism, and on August 7 I was surprised to find that Mr. J. C. Squire took the ordinary view of this question and put it forward positively. In the course of an article on Croce, the Italian dry-as-dust critic of Shakespeare, he wrote in the *Observer*: 'If there is one thing clear about Shakespeare it is that he felt a peculiar affection for his own country and that (since he was far too intelligent not to have put the question to himself) he was prepared to defend his patriotism on practical grounds.' Now this is the ordinary opinion and something more. Mr. Squire does ascribe to Shakespeare something of his own intelligence, and sees that, if his assumption is correct, Shakespeare would certainly have been prepared to defend his love of England.

But to Mr. Squire, Shakespeare is an entity, not a human being who grew and nearly all whose opinions changed with his growth.

To clear the ground, we must admit that patriotism in its extremest form has always been popular in England. Did not Mr. Lloyd George once declare that Britain was the most beautiful country in the world? Everyone admitted it, he added naïvely; which reminds me that President Krüger told me once, in the same spirit, that everyone who used his eyes could see that the sun went round the earth. But, as love of country is perennially popular in Britain, when we find a young dramatist beating the patriotic drum very loudly,

we should take his pæans with a certain discount. Still, it is probable — certain even, if you will — that young Shakespeare, writing in the time of the Armada, did feel a good deal of patriotic fervor. In the famous passage in *Richard II*, he tries, as Mr. Squire guessed he would, to give a reason for the faith that was in him.

This royal throne of kings, this sceptr'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea
Which serves it in the office of a wall
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this
England,

This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Fear'd by their breed and famous by their birth,
Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
For Christian service and true chivalry,
As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
Of the world's ransom, Blessed Mary's Son,
This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,
Dear for her reputation through the world . . .

'This land of such dear souls' shows that Shakespeare was willing to justify his patriotic feeling.

King John was written, in my opinion, about the time of the Armada, and everyone remembers the end of it, phrased by the famous Bastard: —

This England never did, nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself.
Now these her princes are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us
rue,

If England to itself do rest but true.

This 'if' should be kept in mind, I think: it is significant. If England rests true to her best self, Shakespeare tells us, it will be well with her.

The patriotism in *Henry V* is more general, louder-lunged, and more emphatic, but not so sincere. The Archbishop of Canterbury says: —

O noble English that could entertain
With half their forces, the full pride of France;
and the chorus echoes him: —

O England! model to thy inward greatness,
Like little body with a mighty heart.

Even the famous speech of King Henry seems to me mere echo — Shakespeare ventriloquizing, so to speak. Even the words which induced Carlyle to say there was 'a good stroke, too, in this Shakespeare,' do not ring true: —

And you, good yeomen,
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
The mettle of your pasture; let us swear
That you are worth your breeding, which I doubt
not;

For there is none of you so mean and base,
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.

Now limbs made in Timbuktú are just as good as limbs made in England. Shakespeare knew this too, I am pretty sure; knew that 'the dear souls' was the true defense, and not the stalwart limbs. Almost the whole of *Henry V* is to me, factitious: Shakespeare trying to win the groundlings. But accept it as its face-value, make as much of it as you please, it cannot carry this argument.

I have dealt elsewhere with Shakespeare's snobbishness, with his admiration of the young English noblemen whom he has incarnated once for all in Mercutio; young fellows like Southampton, Pembroke, and perhaps Essex, who sat on the stage and listened to his plays with warm appreciation. But suddenly we notice that he has begun to see even this best class of Englishmen as they are, with all their imperfections and shortcomings. The scene between

Portia and her maid, Nerissa, in *The Merchant of Venice*, is unforgettable: —

Nerissa. — What say you, then, to Falconbridge, the young baron of England?

Portia. — You know I say nothing to him, for he understands not me, nor I him. He hath neither Latin, French, nor Italian, and you will come into the court and swear that I have a poor pennyworth in the English. He is a proper man's picture, but, alas! who can converse with a dumb-show? How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour everywhere.

Now, just as when one reads the *Englische Fragmente* of Heine, one is startled by certain words that give the very heart of the matter, so I am startled by this. It shows young Shakespeare outgrowing patriotic snobbery and judging my lords Pembroke and Southampton as they were. They are ignorant, he sees, learned in no language but their own; a proper man's picture, but a dumb show. The Englishman, then, was badly dressed; to-day he is well dressed, the best-dressed man in the world; but, oh, how often is he only a proper man's picture, a poor dumb show. And then his manners. He got his behavior everywhere, Shakespeare says, and it is still to seek.

Shakespeare, one remembers, was blamed for his 'too great sweetness of manners.' This is his reply. Better too great sweetness of manners than the rudeness of the common herd.

So far, I imagine, I shall carry Mr. Squire, even, with me. But now I have to appeal to those who know the soul of Shakespeare and the heights to which he climbed. It is significant to me that toward the very end, in *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare's beloved Imogene should say this of Britain: —

Where then?

Hath Britain all the sun that shines? Day, night,
Are they not but in Britain? I' the world's volume
Our Britain seems as of it, but not in 't;

In a great pool, a swan's nest. Prithee think
There's livers out of Britain.

And more significant still is the *Timon of Athens*, with the great fifth scene in the third act, which should be learned by heart by everyone who wants to know our Shakespeare's supreme intelligence and imperial vision. From the words at the beginning given to Alcibiades, 'For pity is the virtue of the law,' down to Alcibiades's great phrase, which, I think, conveys Shakespeare's considered opinion more perfectly than it is given anywhere else: —

'T is honour with most lands to be at odds.

Here is the first intimation of the truth that the great man always stands above his countrymen and is of necessity often opposed to them.

'T is honour with most lands to be at odds.' That was Shakespeare's opinion, as it was also the opinion of one still more sacred.

This steady growth in insight leads me to the final and conclusive proof that Shakespeare saw patriotism fairly; for he was the very first, I think, to see beyond patriotism to humanity. How

singular this was, even in those spacious days, can be gauged from the fact that Bacon, a man of extraordinary power of mind, when speaking of greatness and great men, puts first the maker of States, then the savior of the State, then the enlarger of the State, and so on. He might have been a Roman with patriotism as a religion, who had never learned that anything could transcend the State.

But Shakespeare goes clean beyond all this. He had identified himself with Antony as he had identified the Dark Lady of the Sonnets with Cleopatra, and he found for Antony words of the highest praise. Even Cæsar mourns his death: —

The death of Antony
Is not a single doom; in the name lay
A moiety of the world.

And Agrippa betters this with the true word for Antony-Shakespeare: —

A rarer spirit never
Did steer humanity; but you, gods, will give us
Some faults to make us men.

Shakespeare came to think little of patriotism, because he was one of those destined to steer humanity.

CONFIDENCES OF GENERAL VON MOLTKE

BY RUDOLF STEINER

[This interview with General Helmuth von Moltke, who was Chief of Staff of the Imperial German Army at the beginning of the World War, was given to Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian sociologist, who later communicated it to M. Jules Sauerwein, a correspondent of the Paris Matin, at Dornach in Switzerland. In 1919 Dr. Steiner was prevented by Prussian protests from publishing the memoirs of General von Moltke, presumably because these memoirs were objectionable, not so much because they constitute an accusation against the Imperial Government, as because they show that Government to have been more disordered and less competent at the beginning of the war than has hitherto been believed.]

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At the end of 1914, Moltke, who had been Chief of the General Staff since 1905, went to Karlsbad for his health. To the time of his death, he knew nothing of what had taken place at the famous Potsdam Council on the fifth or sixth of July; for he did not get back to Berlin until after the ultimatum to Serbia.

From the time of his arrival, he had, he said, a conviction that Russia was going to attack. He saw clearly the tragic development which matters were going to assume; that is to say, he believed that the intervention of France and England in a world-conflict was certain and he wrote a memorandum for the Emperor, containing his plan of operation.

The plan of the German General Staff in its main lines had remained the same for more than fifteen years. It had been devised by von Schlieffen, the predecessor of von Moltke. You know the principle: a launching of great masses of troops against France, in order to secure a swift result at any cost; and the dispatch of a comparatively weak army against Russia, for a defense which it was intended to complete later after the success of operations on the Western front, which was re-

garded as practically certain. Von Moltke had not modified the plan of his predecessor except in one point, which was, however, very important. General von Schlieffen had mapped out a simultaneous attack by way of Belgium and Holland. Von Moltke, in order to give Germany a chance to breathe in case of a blockade, had given up the attack by way of Holland.

When he reached headquarters on Friday, the thirtieth of July, he found himself in the midst of madmen; he had, he said, the impression that he alone was able to make a decision. He requested the Emperor to sign the order for mobilization—an order which, in Germany, was strictly equivalent to a declaration of war, because, from the time this order was signed, everything, including the first military operations, took place at fixed hours, automatically and inexorably; but William II contented himself for the day with declaring a 'state of the danger of war.' The next day, Saturday, July thirty-first, at four o'clock in the afternoon, he had von Moltke summoned again, and during the next six hours the drama took place.

Von Moltke found the Kaiser in company with Bethmann-Hollweg, whose