

## The Fate of Mid-Europe

IT is three years since Mr. Wilson, reading the Covenant of the new League of Nations to the assembled statesmen at Paris, announced that "the miasma of distrust, of intrigue, is cleared away. Men are looking eye to eye and saying 'We are brothers and have a common purpose. We did not realize it before but now we do realize it, and this is our covenant of friendship.'" Three years—but the things he announced then have not yet come true. The League excluded and still excludes Germany and Russia from membership. And the dead hand of the revengeful treaties which were born with the League has kept Europe from realizing that brotherhood in a common purpose which once seemed so near. Little nations were indeed set free, but in an hour of cruelly exaggerated nationalism. Each of the new little nations snarled at the others, established customs frontiers, and did its best to dam the currents of commerce that had linked it with the others.

So through these three years the people of Central Europe have had to wait for even that measure of relative peace which has been the lot of the victors. Austria has seen her unit of money decline in value from twenty cents to one thirty-fifth of a cent; Germany hers from twenty-four cents to half a cent, with all the upsets which that means. It is hard for comfortable Americans to realize the revolution in German and Austrian life caused by this catastrophic depreciation. The old German virtue of thrift has lost its stimulus. Money carefully invested has turned out to be money thrown away. Extravagance alone has stood the pragmatic test of these hectic times. The working-class has not improved its material condition in Germany and the middle classes have lost. The normal, healthy processes of trade and commerce have been hampered by uncertainty as to what Allied demands or hesitations might cause new crises—such as that in Vienna recently, when the police, understanding too well the spirit of the mob, stood by while hungry crowds ransacked the city's shops and robbed the rich men's hotels. Food may double its price overnight in those unhappy countries. And this because the politicians of the victor nations have not yet emerged from the hate-period into a frank acknowledgment of the necessity of economic collaboration.

That is why *The Nation* takes occasion, in this Mid-European Number, to call attention once more to the condition of Central Europe, where the new life stirring is ever hampered by the dead-weight of treaties which perpetuate the war-time hates. The lesser nations have indeed begun to show their elders the way. The little Baltic states first made peace with Russia in defiance of their mentors, England and France, and then began to move toward economic federation. The Great Powers, still reluctant to admit their mistakes, have followed to the extent of "de facto recognition." M. Poincaré reached the height of absurdity, indignantly denying that he had met any Soviet agent while admitting that he was negotiating with Moscow headquarters by wireless. Unurged by those who should have guided them, the "succession states"—Czecho-Slovakia, Rumania, and Jugoslavia—formed the Little Entente, and began negotiating commercial, customs, and arbitration treaties with each other; and finally the Czechs, by negotiating a series of treaties with their old enemy, Austria (printed on page 173 of this issue), have virtually taken that country into the Little Entente, thus paving the way toward eventual reestab-

lishment of the economic unit of the old Austrian Empire.

The treaties are dead; such health as Europe has grows out of their death. So dead is the Treaty of St. Germain that the governments which drew the provisions for Austrian reparations have abandoned their claims and after long and cruel delay now plan to lend her money. The Bulgarians can pay no reparations. France and Italy have signed new peace treaties with a Turkish Government which openly rejects and defies the Treaty of Sèvres, and England soon will have to follow suit. Hungary has hardly pretended to execute the Treaty of the Trianon. Only Versailles still receives the faint honor of lip-worship. Even there, as Mr. Keynes remarks in his brilliant study, "A Revision of the Treaty," "the actions of those in power have been wiser than their words. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that no parts of the peace treaties have been carried out except those relating to frontiers and disarmament." Slowly and reluctantly the reparations provisions have been revised. Mr. Keynes's summary of the antics of Mr. Lloyd George and of the series of French prime ministers, attempting to cope at once with economic facts and with political conditions, is so witty a tale that future historians will find it hard to credit it. But behind its ludicrousness is the cruel story of the effect of these compromises and camouflages upon Central Europe. There the joke is less evident. Europe stumbles blindly and lamely along a path which she might tread firmly and hopefully had she statesmen with courage to speak stirringly of the need to revise the hateful treaties and to re-create Europe not in a spirit of vindictive revenge but in full consciousness of the economic necessity of co-operation and brotherhood. There are times when Mr. Lloyd George, for all his checkered past, comes near to being the man. His vision of a world conference in which Russia and Germany would sit side by side with the Western Powers, and discuss freely and without reserve whatever questions concern the restoration of Europe, was the vision which Europe and the world needs. May such a conference come before the misery and the breakdown of Central Europe creates new and ineradicable bitternesses!

## The Cheerful Pessimist

OPTIMIST and pessimist have long ceased to be terms that have any relation to the reason or to the nature of things. The one is supposed simply to cheer, the other to depress the normally aspiring soul, and it is a well-nigh forgotten exercise to examine the grounds of either's private acts or public utterances. Thus it has come to pass that he who in no sense despairs either of the republic or of mankind, but holds the ills of both to be discoverable and remediable, is fitted out by the popular imagination with a forbidding scowl and a poisoned tongue. Your blithe "booster," on the other hand, who keeps smiling according to the almost national slogan and declares that all things work together for the good of the reasonably healthy in body and honest in business is paid a dollar a word for his editorials and reckoned among the Forces for Good.

It is worth while to examine for a moment this man's title to the name of optimist. He does not, in reality, see the best side of things, because his concern is not with things at all. He thinks he can pack away his own troubles and the troubles of the world in his old kit bag and have any reason left for smiling. He forgets that the troubles

as well as the heartening things of human life are not accidental but inherent in nature. To pack them away is to leave them untouched and uncured. A man afflicted with some grave disorder may indeed, unless the pain becomes too acute, dismiss the fact from his mind and keep smiling until neither medication nor the surgeon's knife can save him from his fate. He may, during the process, give a fleeting cheer to the unobservant only to shock them the more harrowingly by the apparent suddenness of his taking off. But that man can hardly be thought of as an encouraging or an heroic figure. His course of action has been motivated by a hopelessness of alleviation and a terror of the inexorable truth. He is a vivid symbol of your commoner type of optimist. The cheer he brings is pitiful and brief enough.

We have not yet exhausted his psychology. Beneath his hiding away of his own troubles and the troubles of the world are not only despair and fear; there is the steady though obscure hope of a miracle. In the only kind of story he will read or play that he will witness a moral or material miracle, a sudden uncaused change from "bad" to "good", is the central and quite unvarying requirement that he makes. In order to pursue his course and keep his temper he needs constantly to be assured that unexpected inheritances, recoveries of health, and unmotivated changes in human character are part of that disorder which he calls his world. It is, therefore, your professional optimist who fills the coffers of the oil-stock crook, the quack and esoteric healer, the vulgar revivalist. A nation of boosters and smilers supports an unprecedented crowd of miracle-mongers and shies nervously at anyone who tries to strip it of its childish faith in suppressions and palliatives and miracles and lead it toward the tonic world of reality.

Thus it has come about that he who is commonly known among us as a "knocker," a pessimist, and a depressing fellow is nothing in the world but one who has a little courage, a little honest willingness to "face the music," a little hope that things in their real nature are not immedicably foul and wrong. If he fixes his attention upon the darker aspects of reality, it is because these are most to be feared and need, therefore, to be watched in the hope that they may be ameliorated or destroyed. He is often accused because he will not substitute a brand-new panacea for an ancient abuse. But that very unwillingness is a further proof of his fine trust that men can be saved by reason and their own natures and need not necessarily be driven from a crumbling prison into one just built.

For faith in miracles and nostrums our pessimist substitutes a faith in the final manageableness of things. To hope to manage them he must know them as they really are. But this investigation does not depress him in the least. For he is anything but a moral nominalist and he finds much to love and to hope for where the optimist permits himself to be frightened by a bad name. He may not cultivate the perpetual grin, but his gravity will be richly punctuated by laughter; he is no unreflective hustler and booster; he is normally well employed and steadfastly serene. He is amused to think how even Arthur Schopenhauer, the reputed father of his tribe, though he identified the Will to Live with evil in its absolute nature, continued with a passion undiminished by age to proclaim the doctrines he had invented and thus, through a sort of inverted meliorism, bore witness to his faith that a discoverable truth will yet save mankind and make it free.

## Feminist Men

WOMEN of genius are painfully scarce in a world in which men of genius are also painfully scarce, and many theories have been put forward to explain the lack. Well, we have our own explanation: Women are handicapped by a long tradition of accessibility and amiability—qualities which are death to eminence. They have not quite learned—the most independent of them—to shut the door and devote themselves to lofty cerebration while the baby cries and the cook lets the apple sauce burn. And the worst of it is that if they do shut the door the apple sauce will indeed burn. For the success of feminism rests only in part on the valor of women; it involves, first and foremost, the domestic subjection of men. Perhaps men sense this when they spend their lives in the production of monthly magazines devoted to the thesis that housekeeping, although a job that no man would care to undertake, can become in the hands of women an elaborate and efficient profession. Perhaps men realize that their own poor hope of eminence will be decreased if their wives' chances are bettered. Perhaps they are only animated by the more simple, natural desire to have their food cooked for them by someone who does not know how to earn a living in any other way.

At any rate men as a rule do not encourage their wives to "work," and whether they know it or not they are wise to oppose it. For women who work at a profession are susceptible of such heresies as dividing up the household responsibilities and the cares of domestic management. Amiable as they are, they may learn to insist that husbands shall tune their noses to the acrid scent of burning dinners, and their ears to the significant sounds of the nursery. In those precious hours after work when a man might write the masterpiece of his time or by diligent study train his will power to that pitch of determination which no employer can resist, he may, if he is married to a working wife, be found with a damp dish towel draped around his neck pushing the remains of the evening meal into the ice box. Even now to our knowledge such things exist. In one family of our acquaintance—editors must know all sorts—the husband darns his socks and his buttons are sewed on by the tailor. Presumably his wife darns her own; we never investigated the matter. But week by week they take turns with the ordering of meals and with the counting of the wash. Poor chap, he will never write the great American novel they all talk about. The fact that he seemed to be reasonably contented with his lot only made the situation more pathetic.

As women begin thus to discard their amiability, their eminence may increase. When they refuse to be forever on call—like a fireman, ready to spring into his "turn-out" and roll on any alarm—they may get things done, outside of mere jobs and babies and housekeeping. But we fear that the division of domestic labor that feminism is beginning to bring about will not necessarily result in a quantity production of female geniuses. Women and men alike will be tied to a part-time housekeeping job, and alike they will suffer. Masterpieces begun by an aspiring genius on an off-week will die during her next trick at the domestic wheel. Not until there are no more homes or babies, or until husbands do all the housework, or until the cooperative commonwealth comes along will genius, regardless of sex, be allowed to find its wings.