

## “Kultur”

A BRILLIANT reactionary thinker said the other day, in the columns of a French Catholic newspaper, that the Germans are fighting in this war for the ideals of the Revolution. This arresting paradox has its element of truth. The German national gospel has little in common with the impulse which started the French Revolution, but it has revived some of the notions which inspired its later phases. It is equally impatient in face of the facts of race and nationality, and, though it does not dream of human perfectibility, it is Napoleonic in its belief that human nature is raw material which can be organized indefinitely by the paternal state, the schoolmaster, and the drill-sergeant. Two words recur so frequently in the polemics of the Germans and the Allies that they have acquired the significance of battle-standards. “Kultur” and “nationality” have come to be the things for which all the combatants in this confused war believe themselves to be fighting. Thus German emphasis on culture, or civilization—for neither word is quite an adequate translation—makes an instinctive appeal to liberal minds. It conveys the belief that the real things which unite men are ideas, rather than the animal tie of race. It embodies the natural habit of thought of a nation which is led by its professors and its scientists, and whose working class is permeated, as no other is, by the doctrines of social democracy. It blends easily with the idealism of modern civilized men, who have realized for a generation that the fundamental problems of social structure, the relations of capital to labor, and of men to women, are the same in all developed countries. It fits as well the harsher realism of those who see as the central fact of modern life the diffusion by commerce of an industrial civilization over the half-exploited regions of the earth.

But we have not yet translated “Kultur.” It is far from meaning a spontaneous identity in thought across the divisions made by race and history. It is not the spiritual unity of a Catholic Church, nor is it the superpersonal culture which Shelley divined when he sang,

“Greece and her foundations are  
Built above the tide of war.”

It is not even in most contexts the unity of thought of which educated men from New York and Berlin are aware when they meet. It is rather the bond which unites the Prussian and the Bavarian, the English and the Welshman. It is in

and the factory, the law-court and the school. It is centralized culture, a system of civilization. It may be diffused by conquest or injured by defeat. It is affected by the prestige of the nation which professes it. Its dream of becoming a universal culture is dangerously blended with that other dream of world dominion. “Kultur” has a certain distinction among national ideals. It is not tied down to a crude basis of physiology, as Pan-Slavism is, nor yet to an old-world religious belief, as the “truly Russian” patriotism is. It may be stated in universal terms; it is a system of ideas. But it has narrowed itself by its over-emphasis of the state’s function. It dwells to excess on the external unity of regimentation in one framework of laws and institutions. It has derived from these coarser elements its belief in force, and its steam-roller intolerance towards Danes and Poles and Alsatians. Its triumph is the unification of Germany. Its promising and half-completed wish was the construction of modern Austria. It is breaking to-day in Belgium on its own inability to understand the significance of nationality.

The Allies have waved the opposing flag of nationality against the German ideal of “Kultur.” They hold a purely opportunist position. There is indeed a strong vein of sentimental nationalism among English Liberals. It was not strong enough to resist the annexation of the Boer republics, nor the permanent occupation of Egypt, nor the iniquitous partition of Persia. It made its unavailing protests against the conclusion of an alliance with Russia at the moment when she was destroying the national existence of Finland. It is uncomfortably aware, amid the partisan silence of war-time, that the bringing of non-Russian Slavs under Russian rule will be an ironical application of the principle of nationality. It has not quite forgotten that the Servians are holding down a conquered population in Macedonia with all the brutalities of martial law. It realizes, when it pauses to reflect, the difficulties of the future, when the Pan-Slavist ideal of nationality, which is so intimately bound up with Greek orthodoxy, comes into clash with the Jews and Catholics of Galicia and the Armenians of Asia Minor. But of Russia and the East it thinks no oftener than it is obliged. By its pursuit of the principle of nationality in this war, British Liberalism means primarily the liberation of Alsace-Lorraine and the restoration of Belgian independence. These are, both of

the anarchic ideal of independent and unlimited nationality. One knows too well the horrors and confusions which that ideal has wrought in the Balkans to be greatly enamored of it. The British press, indeed, incessantly urges the Balkan peoples to sacrifice some part of their independence by creating a Balkan Federation. The notion which dominated Europe in the generation of Mazzini and Kossuth, that the expression of nationality in a state organization within guarded frontiers under a flag has any supreme positive value, has ceased indeed to attract modern minds. What English Liberals mean by their enthusiasm for nationality and their idealization of little nations is to-day little more than a dislike of violence, intolerance, and coercion. No one seriously thinks that a minor race or a little people contributes anything of inordinate value to the universe by maintaining a jealous identity and cultivating a political individualism. But it is an intolerable evil that a little nation should be overrun by brute force, or that a racial minority should suffer constraint in the use of its own language or the cult of its historical religion. The positive value of nationality is no longer political. Politics in all modern states turn on questions of class and social organization. Race and nationality are nothing but a nuisance and a hindrance when they cut across the more fruitful lines of controversy. The positive worth of nationality lies to-day rather in the intangible and ideal world of literature and tradition. A frontier is less essential to it than a language.

The plain fact is that the Allies, though this war has made them the champions of nationality, have in reality advanced far beyond the ideals of 1848. They object to any brutal infraction of the rights of nationality—more especially by Germans. But they are making a world in which nationality must come to terms with "Kultur." The reconciliation must be sought by the elimination of the element of forcible regimentation from the German ideal. We hardly see as yet the dilemma into which our championship of Belgian nationality has driven us. Sir Edward Grey said that Belgian independence would be gone if Belgian neutrality could be violated with impunity by German arms. He spoke truly, but it is also true that Belgian independence is gone when it must be vindicated by British arms. Belgium has become, however kindly, however chivalrous the relation may be, a dependent of the Franco-British alliance. Her internal autonomy may be as secure as the independence of a British colony, but her security, her African possessions, her foreign policy, depend inexorably henceforth on the good-will of London

a minor ally, moreover, of Britain and France. From the moment that the conflict between Germany and the Western Powers became acute in 1906, Belgium had to choose which diplomatic orbit she would enter. Independence, after Europe had become an armed camp, became for nearly all the minor European states an impossible ideal. Sweden must lean for support against Russia upon Germany; Servia clings to Russia, and Portugal to Britain. One may go further. The Great Powers themselves must sacrifice something of their independence to their alliances. The pursuit of a balance of power and the interpenetration of cosmopolitan finance have made the nationalism of 1848 as remote and as obsolete as the individualism of the Manchester school. A little nation which owes its survival to the British navy, the Russian army, and the French banks, is no longer an independent state, though it may still retain its individual traditions.

This conflict of ideals can have no satisfactory solution by the triumph of either. Isolated nationality has been wrecked by the development and rivalry of great empires. German "Kultur" lost its chance of leadership, its dream of unifying alien races, by its reliance upon force and its Bismarckian tradition of brutality. There is a promise of security and justice for all states, small or great, only by a forward step towards a genuine federation. It may turn out that this war will figure in history as a struggle which secured the unity of a continent as literally as did the American war between North and South. We must somehow recover the truth which the French Revolution and the German ideal of "Kultur" have both emphasized, that men are united more truly by ideas than by race. But we shall reach this finer civilization only when the jealous instinct of race is secure against violence and intimidation.

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## Equality

LAST evening I happened by accident upon a strange coming together of the ends of New York. Seated on couches and chairs in the spacious, unpretentious drawing-room were unemployed men, recruited from the bread line and the lodging-houses. These unemployed—there were some thirty of them—were the guests of men and women prominent in the city government and in social reform. They had been called in to give their advice to experts, to explain how relief work should be organized, to discuss the infinitely complex problem of unemployment. It