

Selling Sin

By DON C. SEITZ

EVER since Eve ate the apple in Eden there has been a good market for sin—not necessarily among sinners. Indeed, it is safe to say that a large share of the customers come from excellent people, who are curious to see what Satan is like and pay high prices for first-night seats. Theatrical managers have discerned this habit, and many cater to it. So long as one or two daring things a season are produced all goes well. The dramatic critics, if favorably disposed, mention them with admiration as expressions of art, and liberal-minded editors like Oswald Garrison Villard deplore any demand that may arise for censorship. Then the season ends and the immoralities become dormant.

Sometimes, however, the thing is overdone. New York has just found itself too liberally supplied with illuminated vice. It could stand "Desire Under the Elms" as a tragic depiction of moron New England, but when it came to selling sin wholesale the authorities woke up

—not from an impelling agitation by clergymen, but from a sense of nausea. Companies of actors and actresses have been arrested and there is a loud cry for legislative restriction of some sort. England has a system of censorship that seems to work. Here the very word "censor" starts a howl.

How, then, should we view the question of publicly peddling infractions of the moral laws? Is there not a dividing line that should be respected? The surgeon who bares the body of a woman does it to save her life. The showman who bares it does so to sell her soul. The painter who uses his brush to create a great figure out of inspiration is entitled to his right in art; yet if he prostituted his genius to sell a lascivious picture he ought to be in jail.

The free-for-all declare that nothing is so dangerous to liberty as discrimination. Is this so? Cannot it be demonstrated in all fairness whether a play is Art or Prostitution? It certainly can be. It gets down to the point at once whether

the offensive thing is designed to make money or to express some one's belief that a great dramatic point is being developed. The foreground of "Virginius" told plainly enough a tale of baseness. The tragedy purified it. Endless examples could be cited without difficulty.

Nothing can be more discreditable to the dramatic profession than the deliberate production of plays that are vile for the purpose of attracting audiences and making money. The drama as devised by the old Greeks had a high purpose. That high purpose still has a place in human affairs. It is there that the modern drama belongs. Back-fence vulgarity, the indecencies of the corner loafer, the coarseness of criminals, have no place on the stage. To say that such things exhibit life as it is is not true. They do not. The percentage of the good, the beautiful, and the true in nature and life can be safely set at 99 per cent. Why should it be besmirched by sellers of sin, whose only object is to fill their unclean pockets?

A Debt-Solution Suggestion

By IRVING T. BUSH

THE other day I sat beside one of the most successful publishers in the United States. We were lunching in his private dining-room, and, in company with half a dozen other men all of them successful in their particular line of work, were idly discussing the debts due the United States from Europe. My friend, the publisher, has a clear mind and a wide experience with the world. In the course of our discussion he made a statement which so impressed me that I have been thinking about it whenever I have had the courage to think about our debt problem. He said: "To me there is something immoral about debts between nations the payments of which extend over a long period of years, and must inevitably affect negotiations between the representatives of those nations."

I had never thought of the matter in just that way, but since then I have seen the specter of the war debt peering over the shoulders of statesmen gathered about their council tables for generations to come, and I have wondered if that was a healthy thing, until I have become convinced that it is unhealthy to the

point of being charged with danger for our future. This may sound as though I was arguing in favor of cancellation. I am not. In fact, I am not thinking in terms of how much any nation owes or does not owe to us. I am content to leave the determination of that troublesome detail to the representatives of the nations involved. Some day an agreement will be reached. The question I am asking is, "What then?" Must our Government sit at each council table for generations to come as the debt collector of the world, or can some way be found to take that burden from our shoulders and yet preserve our just rights.

My friend went on to outline his idea that the international debt slate should be wiped clean, except whatever amount it was finally determined the people of Germany could pay, and that bonds for this amount be given by Germany to the Allies in Europe, and by them turned over to the United States in full payment of their debt to us.

The next step in his program was to have these bonds sold to American investors, and thus take our Govern-

ment out of the debt-collecting business.

I liked the basic idea immensely, but I am not convinced that the method outlined by my friend is either practical or desirable. In the first place, one of the unpleasant things which has been said by people in Europe when they have wanted to say unpleasant things has been that all of the money which they are to receive from Germany is to be paid over to us, and that we are the only ones who have benefited from the war. I have a hazy idea that no one has benefited from the war, and a little more definite idea that we have succeeded in giving an impression to the people of Europe which is most unfair to the people of the United States. I cannot, therefore, give very enthusiastic support to a plan which turns over to us all of the obligation assumed by Germany, and makes us appear to be the only ones who get anything out of the debt settlement.

I AM not so set in my convictions that I cannot recognize changed conditions when they occur. It seems to me

that things have changed, and that certain elements of common sense are being lost sight of. We live in an economic world, and international debts are a business problem. While this is true, it has been extremely difficult for our able representatives on the Debt Funding Commission to reconcile their very real desire to be considerate to our friends in Europe with a reasonable business treatment of the problem.

Much of the money advanced after the Armistice undoubtedly was used to pay obligations incurred during the war, but it is also true that some of the money advanced before the Armistice was used for purposes which had no direct connection with the actual prosecution of the war. It is almost impossible to divide the debt into two parts—war debt and peace debt. It is, however, useless to discuss these points. No one is ever convinced by such a discussion except the man making the argument. There are those who believe all debts should be canceled, and another school which believes they should all be paid. I think it is better to agree that they are both right, and center our attention upon the undoubted economic fact that the only debts which are likely to be paid are those which the debtor is capable of paying, and to arrange that payments we receive come in a way which makes clear to every one the fairness of the transaction.

From our standpoint, the trouble so far is not with what we have done, but with the way we have done it. We have managed to do a generous thing in a manner which has made us look ungenerous to others. Our talk of "capacity to pay" has a hard sound. We have not meant to be hard, but we have done our best to appear so. We were not responsible for the phrase "capacity to pay." It was found in the Versailles Treaty and laid on our doorstep. We innocently adopted it. To us it did not mean an ungenerous settlement, taking from a debtor to the limit of his capacity. We interpreted it to mean a settlement based upon a generous consideration of all the elements involved. The phrase was unfortunate, however, and many believe we demand the utmost farthing it is possible to obtain. Having gone so far in our generosity, it might have been better to have gone a little farther. Certainly, the United States would be placed in a much more pleasant light if we had canceled a few millions more and completely wiped out the debt for money loaned during hostilities, leaving only the debt contracted since the Armistice, to be funded at a fair rate of interest. If there is any difference in the amount we

would receive under such an arrangement, it is trifling. Besides, we are more likely to be paid an amount which bears on its face evidence of our generosity. Instead, we seem to exact our pound of flesh. This is nobody's fault. Our Funding Commission has done a fine, considerate job. It is just one of those unfortunate accidents in long-distance negotiating between two sensitive peoples.

The essential thing is to adopt a method which will provide an interest rate that will make it possible to sell to private investors such bonds as we may ultimately receive, and thus take them out of the hands of Government, and put them where they belong, in the strong boxes of private investors. This is the goal to keep always in mind.

IF such a plan is desirable, how can it be brought about? The first step is to call a conference at the right time—whenever that may be determined to be—for the purpose of suggesting a method by which the ownership of debt securities can be transferred from nations to individuals. Every one, including Germany, should be a part of such a conference. The German settlement was the reverse of common sense. It was a splendid achievement, under the circumstances. The Dawes Commission was without power to determine how much Germany should pay, but only how payments should be made. The result was an indeterminate obligation, subject to change, which may go on the rocks, and is certain to breed trouble some time. No one is certain of anything, except that misunderstanding is inevitable sooner or later. But if a conference is to be called, who will call it; and how will it be constituted? The recent proposal of the Columbia University professors served the useful purpose of making people think about a conference, but it did not point a definite way. A "Conference of Interested Parties" would merely mean cutting up the interests of the most interested party. The American representatives would be very lonely in a hostile crowd. The professors also hurt their case by what came very close to being an argument of controversial matter. A conference, if called, must be impartial, or it cannot be just, and it should not be composed of politicians, but of business men and bankers who gather around a table with the intention of advising methods which they would adopt if their own affairs were in the same kind of a mess. The only mandatory power should be to suggest a way by which the debts between governments can be made safe for pri-

vate investors and passed on to them. It may not be the opportune time just now, but we can think ahead a little and have a program before us.

IF we are to have such a conference, it must be suggested by some one. The United States is the wealthiest nation. It has a large interest—perhaps the largest interest—in the problem. We are a generous people who are placed before the world in an ungenerous light. We should take the first step. We may well say to France that when final agreement has been reached as to the amount to be paid we will call a conference to consider steps to take all governments out of the business of owning securities, and to thus relieve the strain upon government finance by finding a way to transfer them to private investors. Such an arrangement should help France, for it would provide a way to cash the obligation assumed by Germany.

If the conference be called and a way is suggested for the permanent funding of debts at current interest rates, how are the securities to be taken out of government hands and transferred to private ownership? One way is to place them in the hands of international bankers of all countries, with instructions to sell as opportunity offers and to remit the proceeds to the government entitled to them.

This would not be an immensely difficult task. The amount involved is, of course, large, but there are investors in every country in the world who would willingly purchase such securities if they were the result of an arrangement which would make their status certain. There are, of course, many details. Cross-entries between certain nations might wipe a part of the debts off the international books. There is precedent also for a guaranty of the obligation of certain nations, and much can be said in favor of having the war debt turned into a peace debt represented by bonds bearing the indorsement of all of the nations involved. Such an obligation in the hands of the investors of the world would be a more gentle visitor at international council tables than the specter of a war debt.

It would not require new capital to absorb all of the securities issued. In the United States, for instance, money paid to the trustees for their purchase would be turned over to the United States Government and used for the retirement of Liberty Bonds. This would merely be a change on the part of the investor from one security to another, and would result in the reduction of the Government debt, and therefore in the

tax for the purpose of paying interest upon such debt.

The net result would be to organize international debts upon a business basis and to transfer their ownership from government treasuries, where they are a source of irritation, to private investors, where they can provoke no ill will.

PERHAPS somebody else can suggest a better way to accomplish such a result. If so, more power to him. While sitting on the international fence chewing a straw, with a friendly and good-natured interest in the troubles of the world, I have become convinced that it is time to again let a group of business men get around a table to determine the

common sense of the situation. This does not mean cancellation. It is readjustment, to eliminate ill feeling between governments and misunderstanding between peoples, and for investments to be owned by investors. It will exorcise the specter at international good-will feasts, lay at permanent rest the most troublesome skeleton in our international closet.

The Destiny of Russia¹

The Intellectuals and the Peasants

By COUNT LEO TOLSTOY

THE Russian poet, Tutcheff, said in one of his poems that "one cannot understand Russia by the mind or reason; one can only have faith in her." The intellectuals of Russia were fond of repeating this aphorism, seeing in it an excuse for all Russia's shortcomings and the calamities that overtook the nation.

It is certainly not easy to understand thoroughly the life and character of the Russian people, but it is equally certain that if the *intelligentsia* had ever exerted themselves to wield a really helpful and uplifting influence on the masses Russia's social and political progress would not have become mired in the bog of revolution. Their influence, especially that of the later Russian writers, on the life of the people was great. That it was a negative influence is a sorrowful fact which events have proved.

If the intellectual class of Russia, liberal as it was in its beliefs and actuated by high political ideals, had ever worked out a unified and practical program for the benefit of the people to whose aspirations it professed to be devoted, it could have averted the deluge which engulfed it together with the rest of the nation. To-day we find the *intelligentsia* of old Russia scattered to the four corners of the world, swept away by the same hurricane that crumbled the political life of a great country and leaving a nation almost barren of an entire class which for centuries had been thought to be its intellectual bulwark.

THAT significant fact raises a question of political and psychological interest: If a great nation can in a few years practically exterminate its intellectuals and replace them with a group of politicians, of what value, then, were the famous Russian *intelligentsia* to the na-

tion, so weak that it could neither prevent nor stop the revolt of its people? The answer is obvious. That value, in its political sense, was nil.

A man struggling in the water and about to go down needs something more than dispassionate advice from philosophers on the river bank. Russia's intellectuals, when not disputing among themselves on what could be done to save the drowning man or speculating on his prospects of reaching the shore, threw out to him life-lines of cobweb. They wove their finely spun theories while the peasants struggled on.

This great instability of the intellectual leaders, their lack of a common program, their failure to work out and unite on a political doctrine suitable for the nation, and the feebleness of their disjointed efforts helped bring on the chaos which their gifts and positions of influence could have averted. The fact that the intellectual class, with tremendous influence at its command, failed to use that influence wisely or rise to its opportunities heightens the tragedy of the Revolution.

WHAT was the main source of this disunity and instability of a great group composed individually of many men who were capable, high-minded, and sincere? It can be traced essentially to Russian literature. The philosophical, spiritual, and political ideas of the great writers had for the most part no vital foundation on the realities of Russian life. Russian readers never found in the books of their great writers any sound political ideas that they could grasp. Philosophical speculations contained in the works were beyond their comprehension. All that they did grasp was a realization of wrong. The ideas of the later great writers filtered through the social strata, stimulating unrest and discontent, but offering in relief nothing more substan-

tial than dreamy wisps of hope that ended in the clouds. Thus they assiduously tilled the ground for the seed of Socialist propaganda, and their successors reaped the whirlwind.

Idealism and impracticality were the twin sisters of the literature of Russia. Novelists, historians, journalists, and philosophers all were repeating the same liberal sentiments, dreaming of the new freedom and the new happiness, without realizing how hard must be the work and how gradual the process to attain them. They implanted in the minds of the masses a vague hope, but showed them no way to achieve it.

When Russian literature flowered in the genius of Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, the literary influence was at its peak. It supplanted the religious and the political influences, the two other currents that formed the intellectual class. The liberal ideas of the French Revolution, though they had their origin in philosophy and literature, had been interesting to Russia mostly in their political aspects. But the influence of the later Russian writers was anti-political. Opposition to the Government, accusal and protest against every institution, against every form of power, and against every man-made law was the theme of most of the writers of that era. No suggestion for reform, practicable in the life of the Russian people, was ever offered. The influence was devastatingly destructive.

IN many of its manifestations this influence was more than anti-political. It was also anti-religious. It helped rob the Russian people of their faith. Many of the so-called liberal writers boasted of having no religion at all. Turgenev was one of those non-believers, and there were many others—Chekoff, Zlotovrotsky, and Uspensky among them—all helping to batter down the people's citadel of faith. My father was the greatest

¹ Another article by Count Tolstoy under the same general title appeared in the issue for February 9.