

## BRAIN-WAVES DURING THE HEAT-WAVE

THE Pagan conception of the Universe has one great philosophical advantage over its competitors; this, that it recognizes a certain sardonic humor in the Lords of Destiny. It is a little more than practical joking, and a little less—but not much less—than Sadism. This humor is hidden from academic and commercial minds; even among artists it is only a few that understand and enjoy it.

Observe what happens to our ideals! One has only to formulate a desire in order to find Fate force one into a passionate denial of it. We seek to escape from the "dull monotony" of marriage, only to find ourselves the prey of a procession of the most tedious chorus girls.

We find no hate so embittered as that engendered by Love. The more one tries to help the poor, the more poor one makes them. One has only to overthrow a tyranny to find oneself compelled to impose the death penalty for sneezing, as Dictator Kerensky would bear witness. To make the world safe for democracy we must abandon all popular control of the Executive. To destroy militarism we must create a military caste.

ALL this is in the nature of things; it is the standing joke of the Gods; and those who only joke with deificulty add to our pleasure by their freely expressed annoyance.

The whole spirit of ancient comedy is resumed in the universal plot, which has been the basis of every religious legend. You take a man, dress him up as a Priest or a King or a hunter, and set out with him to the chase or the war or the sacrifice. Then, before you kill him, you break it to him gently that he is himself the destined victim of whom you spoke so eloquently! The whole of one's attitude to life depends on whether this strikes one as a joke or not. If not, you are the "goat."

IT has been suggested that, when Mr. Balfour came over to this country, saluted Mr. Wilson as the Savior of Democracy, urged him to make sure of the war loans, and cast flowers and tears upon the tomb of Washington, the wily Scot was playing just this joke. Mr. Wilson's high seriousness fits him to be a victim, and Mr. Balfour's humor is of just this order.

But that any one in the world should believe Balfour a democrat is almost inconceivable. I have a very great respect for Mr. Balfour. His uncle, Lord Salisbury, was called "a lath painted to look like iron"; but Miss Arabella is iron painted to look like a lath.

THERE are only two theories of government; Socialism and Anarchism. Most existing states compromise. But "in the last analysis" (good phrase, that! I wonder why no one ever used it before), the one runs quite amusingly into the other. The excessive individualism of this country has created trusts so large that a single step further would turn them into state-owned concerns. Similarly, socialism always topples into anarchy the moment it becomes universal. A man is not very much hampered by being called an official of the state: what he loses in one way he more than makes up in another. The form of government makes little odds to a nation, so long as wolves have teeth, and lambs have fleeces.

BUT there are three inestimable treasures in monarchy; yea, four things joyful which other systems do not give.

Firstly, one knows pretty well who the king is; if it be not himself, it is his mistress or his barber, which may be even better.

Secondly, the king is a human being like oneself, not an unassailable abstraction. Theoretically, one can approach him and obtain a request. Even a refusal is better than a beating of the air; at least one knows where one is. But one cannot ask favors of a Cosmic Urge or get the ear of an Economic Trend.

Thirdly, one can estimate the situation of the moment; one can judge of human actions, even when they are monstrously inhuman. Committees have no soul to damn, and no body to kick; so they are capable of actions which are not human at all, in any proper sense of the word. Even their most admirable laws lack the human touch. Who would not rather be a beggar dependent on the careless generosity of drunkards and prostitutes than a well-fed pauper in a workhouse? The first may (by a miracle) get a five or ten dollar bill now and again; the second is shorn clear of hope; his fate has become visibly ineluctable; he can see clear down a well-swept avenue of slavery all the way to the Mausoleum.

Fourthly, when a king becomes intolerable, one can cut his head off and get another, with some hope of gain by the change. But all committees are on the same dead level of heartlessness and stupidity.

IT is in such forlorn vestiges of democracy as Congress that the expert sleuth can trace the wailing ghosts of the Social Contract and Magna Charta. We are still in that slave-minded condition where we feel the necessity of explaining our actions to others. We dare not drink beer without some sort of medical approval; we excuse ourselves for love on eugenic grounds; in other words, we are all afraid of each other. It was not enough to elect our best and bravest man to the Presidency; he felt bound to explain what needed no explanation, and naturally he has failed to convince a great many people. "L'état c'est moi" can only be answered by the lie direct. To give one's "reasons" is to appeal to reason; and reason happens to be a kind of interminable game of chess in which neither side can win. Reason has not yet decided so much as whether we exist at all.

IN all crisis a dictator is a necessity. Gallipoli was a better bet than Salonica; even disaster is preferable to inaction. Fabius, "qui cunctando restituit rem," has been represented as a slow-moving person by such imbeciles as the modern Fabians, who impudently took his name. No: Fabius was an exceptionally quick individual; it was the enemy in whom he induced the slowness.

Committees inevitably mean delay. The rules of debate, the rights of the minority; the whole conception of such bodies is to hear all sides, to thresh everything out, to fight every detail to a finish. And there is this particular purpose in view—to check autocracy.

In peace-time, in matters of no urgency, this is well enough. In war it is comic. Soldiers voting upon