

their next manoeuvre is, of course, the *reductio ad absurdum*.

WHY then do we not take our own common-sense psychology to heart? Why do we not realize that, whatever may work in peace, we must have the "benevolent despot" in war-time? Because we fear that he may use his power to enslave us after the victory. Free men should not suffer such fear; they should rely upon themselves to supply a tyrannicide if need arose. While people are quarreling as to whether to build steel ships or wood, whether the people are to drink beer or nut sundae, whether a piece of bread should be buttered on the right side or the left, nothing is done.

IHAPPENED to be in Eastbourne, England, a month or so after the war began. It was bad enough to watch the hordes of cigaretted slackers; but after all that might have been the indifference of courage. What struck me as symptomatic of sheer rottenness was the regiment of tub-thumpers howling out the advantages of their competing brands of religion and ethics. In war one needs a crude belief (like Mohammed's or Mr. Roosevelt's) in some equivalent of Thor. People who cannot shed their civilized criticism, for the time being, will not make good soldiers. If one were to analyze the pacifist, one would find him, as a rule, an over-educated man, a man the slave of his own reason, unable to become a savage when the occasion arises for dealing with savages. One must fight fire with fire. Hence we find the bench of bishops in England opposing reprisals for the air raids. Leave it to the "atheistic" French to kill 200 school children in Karlsruhe!

FOR three years I have fought against muddle and hypocrisy. We should not pretend that it is possible to fight with kid gloves on. If we killed our prisoners, and cooked their hearts and livers to give us courage, it would be no worse; and we should know where we were. War under Queensberry rules is not war at all, because there is nobody to exact any penalty for the breach of these rules. "Atrocities" is a good cry when you have a referee who can award you the fight on a foul; in a tussle with another savage for life or death, the cry is simply the wail of a weakling. Now that the referee, Uncle Sam, is in the war himself, we can at least stop this, and become as "atrocious" as the English in Ireland and South Africa, the French in Madagascar, the Belgians in the Congo, the Germans in South West Africa, the Russians in Finland, the Italians in Tripoli, the Turks in Armenia—is there any one stupid enough not to see what St. Paul saw? "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

SO now we have what has been always admitted to be the best of all possible governments—a benevolent despot. There is nothing personal about it. It is the will of the people incarnated in a single mind. It is the apotheosis of democracy. The arrangement is exceedingly convenient in other ways. It solves the puzzling problem of the name for this particular section of the American continent. *Wilsonia* is neat and easy to remember; and it has further the advantage of sounding like an apartment house in the Bronx. To make things pleasant all around, the wilder parts of the country might be called, on the South African analogy, the *Roose Veldt*.

BUT whatever may be the powers exercised by any government, there is one thing which cannot be done without a revolution. That is to interfere with the customs of the people. A custom may be the silliest superstition, or the most detestable habit, but it is inviolable. History is full of examples of tyrants who fell because of attempts to interfere in such methods. I almost wish I had not forgotten my history, because I should like to quote a whole lot of examples. However, history is all lies; it will be just the same if I invent a few cases. Timur Bukh was assassinated by a child of twelve years old in the midst of his victorious army, only a month after he promulgated his infamous decree forbidding his use of toothpicks. Mamilius tried to alter the date of the festival of the God Rumtum, and his dynasty crumbled in an hour. The emperor, Chwang Myang, lost his throne through forbidding people to feed goldfish on oatmeal as formerly.

AS a matter of fact there is a recent and rather terrible case, the Sipahi Mutiny in India. The entire country had submitted uncomplainingly to all sorts of tyrannies and exactions. But as soon as the Mohammedan thought that he was to be compelled to defile himself with pig, and the Hindu with cow, there was an immediate outbreak. It is impossible to alter by an act of legislation those deep-seated customs which refer to the satisfaction of the primary needs of men, the need to support life and the need to reproduce it. It is notorious that a food riot is the most terrible of all the danger signals.

BUT interference with those customs which contain reference to pleasure is even more dangerous. The man of the common people has so little pleasure in his life. It is as crazy as it is criminal to attempt to remove the little he has got. Robbing the poor man of his beer is a desperate adventure.

IF prohibition were enforced in any State, revolution would instantly follow. Trouble does not arise in dry States under the present system, because in addition to the pleasure of drinking you have the pleasure of thinking that you are putting one over on the law. It is humiliating to reduce men to the level of school boys. I shouldn't care to do it myself; but I dare say it is good fun for those who like it.

TO attempt any such change in war time is entirely suicidal. I am perfectly convinced that the prohibition of Vodka was the determining cause of the Russian revolution. If any Russians hate Germans, it is not for any economic reasons. The Russian peasant does not understand political economy; he knows scarcely more than the average professor of that subject in a university. But the story was put about that the Germans had mutilated his ikons; and that put him into a baresark rage, although it did him no manner of harm.

THE whole history of popular warfare is that of the attack and defense of sacred symbols, or superstitions, or customs, that could not be rationally defended for a moment. I do not know whether I like beer or not; for as it happens I have never tasted it. But I value my option. If any one comes into my office, and forbids me to drink beer, one of us has got to die. Any person not similarly irrational and violent has no just title to the name of man. A. C.