England On the Brink of Revolution

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"The Author of the following brilliant article is not only a revolutionary thinker but actually a revolutionist. The New York *Times* of July 13th gives a long account of how Aleister Crowley, accompanied by several patriotic Irishmen, renounced, in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor, all allegiance to England and declared the birth of the Irish Republic. In the dawning light Crowley solemnly read the new Irish Declaration of Independence."

You have all read that very interesting pendant to *Man and Superman,* "The Revolutionists' Handbook," and are sure to remember how John Tanner points out that the British Constitution provides for government by revolution. Every seven years the Blues and the Buffs must have it out once more in the merry town of Eatanswill. The people, if they wish, can calmly and deliberately adopt slavery, cannibalism, and piracy as the national ethics. This is a natural enough state of affairs, for the framers of the Constitution were men actually engaged in revolutions. They were cutting beads from recalcitrant kings; even parliaments were liable to invasion by wart-nosed brewers with brains, ambition, and a faithful body of close-cropped, jack-booted, pious ruffians with long swords and more skill than scruple in using them. In order to enjoy similar effects without the trouble of resorting to these methods, the system of organized mob rule which passes in England and America for democracy was devised. As, however, people do not desire revolutions or even any sort of government, but only to be let alone to earn their living and to enjoy their lives, the practical result was imperceptible. Autoc-

racy continued in a duller and less ambitious manner. The rulers of the country being a committee, and so having no body to kick, no soul to damn, and no mind to make up, nothing was ever done. The antagonism of parties was soon no more than a mask for secret agreement. In England, for over a hundred years, there has been no genuine party strife. Parnell was irreconcilable, and every one combined against him. No sooner did he gain the balance of power than one of the other parties conveniently split, and took it away from him. For he demanded the genuine article in revolutions; he really wanted freedom for Ireland. When he once again began to be dangerous, and further adjustments to party were inconvenient, they ingeniously forged letters to prove him to be a murderer. The weapon unfortunately recoiled, owing to the existence of an incorruptible judge upon the bench — it was generally recognized that he was a little mad! In despair, they published the adultery of the Irish leader, and the other 669 members of Parliament, most of whom were in the same boat, or one differing from it only in so slight a matter as sex, were properly horrified. Parnell had committed the Unpardonable Sin; which is, to take a serious interest in something that matters. For to do so might possibly upset the oligarchy; you never can tell; you cannot be too careful. You may flaunt a dozen girls from Daly's in the face of all Piccadilly; but you may not say a word in favor of allowing drunkenness as a ground for divorce. The Cabinet has had room for at least three avowed atheists at one time; and that Cabinet upheld the prosecution of a perfectly harmless ass for the "blasphemy" of repeating the commonplaces of the sixpenny books of the Rationalist Press Association. As long as you are gentlemanly, and show no desire to upset anything or anybody, you can do as you please. I am personally acquainted with a literary volcano who is in constant eruption. Poems, plays, stories, essays, tumble scoriatically from his crater, and all either conceal the most ob-

scene jests, or openly celebrate and advocate the most abominable crimes known to the law. But he is of good family and has plenty of money; he drinks and smokes as a gentleman should; he is a very agreeable dinner companion; and he takes the most optimistic view of society, regarding it as being no less corrupt than himself. Consequently, even when his personal enemies (who are no class) take his books to the police, the guardians of morality can find no fault in that just person.

On the other hand, Frank Harris, who is considered a little dangerous, owing to his associating with people like Ben Tillett, who might conceivably throw a real bomb, has about as much liberty of speech as a dumb-waiter, and is hounded out of England on the first pretext that comes handy.

Bernard Shaw is at last taken with some seriousness; he has been discovered to be an independent thinker; and he is reported to be in danger of his life.

There is a very excellent story which illustrates the English temper. At a post not far from the firing line some soldiers are having a smoking contest. A few German prisoners are present. The officer in charge is called away for a few moments, and returns to find the sergeant-major announcing, "Our friends, 'Ans an' Fritz, will now oblige with the 'Ynm of 'Ate." This is admirably characteristic of (1) the absolute good-humor of the outdoor type of Briton and his incapacity to feel resentment, (2) the bomb-proof complacency which makes it incredible to him that any one should hate him.

Indeed one cannot hate this type of Englishman. Learoyd, Ortheris, and Mulvaney are as lovable as any characters in fiction. The hateful, the loathsome, the despicable Englishman is not of the old aristocracy, or of the peasantry, or of the working classes except in rare cases of corruption by cheap literature; he is of the mean, petty, cheating, hypocritical tradesman type; and unfortunately it is this type that rules the country. The

Norman was strong and crafty, but also true, brave, and generous; in modern England he has been shouldered out of the Government. For one thing, he was himself too much like a revolutionary to please the plum-duff minds of the majority.

We must go back a little in history to see how England has dealt with her revolutionaries. With private persons the method has been always the same. The ruling class wished to be left in peace to exploit the slave class, and the slaves were so comfortable, on the whole, and so mindful of what happened to them when their masters fell out (as in the War of the Roses and the Civil War), that they were always ready to lend solid support to the party in power. As it happened, however, there have always been certain quite unassimilable elements in the Kingdoms. The Celt is utterly opposed in race, temperament, language, and disposition to the Saxon. He is a mountaineer, and has all the pride and independence which the breeze blows from the hills. For centuries he robbed the long-suffering lowlander, wealthy, cowardly, and corrupt. This state of things was not ended until 1745, when General Wade made military roads through the Highlands and deliberately laid waste the country. The similar intentional depopulation of Ireland needs no description in an essay primarily intended for American readers. Each one of them has at least three friends whose grandfathers were either starved out or persecuted out of Ireland. However, there is a limit to which even England can go in the way of wholesale massacre, and the Celts, being both brave and intelligent, soon sent over many men capable of conquering the British government by the simple process of taking charge of it. They could not be kept out; and the only condition required of them was that they should behave themselves in their new position. There were but few so endowed with that rarest and most unhappy gift, the determination to stand for truth and justice, and they unselfishly refused the shameful bargain. Or, they

were to some extent befooled by the political idea that they could use their power to obtain better terms for their less fortunate compatriots. So even today we see people like John Redmond completely nobbled, and the trust of the people betrayed. Had John Redmond struck for Irish independence in August last, they would not have dared to imprison him. But there would have been certain dinner parties at which he would no longer have been welcome. In such silken cords does England net the swordsmen!

Very similar tactics have been used in the matter of social revolution. Leigh Hunt was imprisoned long ago, but when it was found that not only Shelley, whose father was a baronet, but Byron, actually a peer, were behind him, the affair was smoothed over. Later rebels of all kinds were hushed rather than suppressed. The idiotic treatment of Charles Bradlaugh stands out as almost the only exception to the rule. Whenever any spirit showed a gleam of the true fire, it was extinguished by flattery. Kind sympathizing friends, exquisitely dressed, pointed out quite truly that there was no real harm in soap and water, that a clean collar improved the appearance, that a frock coat with a gardenia, pearl-grey trousers, and a sapphire pin in an Ascot necktie, did really make life easier in London. It was much less troublesome and much more effective than the "Scavenger's Daughter" of the Middle Ages. The man himself did not know that he was fettered; did not understand why he had lost the confidence of the class which he would have given his life to help!

There is unfortunately an objection to even the softest cushioned Callipyge sitting on the safety-valve. It is an obvious one. The poison of discontent is cumulative in its effects. The Plantagenets and the Tutors and the Stuarts were on the whole less intolerable than the Georges. Mr Layton Crippen, in his superb picture of ancient and modern life, *Clay and Fire,* has shown, Titianesque, the warmth and color of the Middle Ages, the

greyness of our own times. Life in the fifteenth century might be full of fear and anxiety, of misery and disease and hardship, but people had leisure, and life held all the interest of mystery. Today everything is commonplace, unless one can reach out beyond science to the dangerous edge of the Unknown. And only a few specially gifted, and sufficiently wealthy people, can do this. It is harder to get out of the rut than ever before. Captain J. F. C. Fuller attributes many modern "inexplicable" crimes to the revolt of the soul from the boredom of daily toil. When adventure was possible, one endured. At any moment a dragon might arrive from the next country, of a Knight in Green Armor drop in for a stirrup-cup, or one might meet a Little Old Woman who would grant Three Wishes. Even if one is being oppressed, there are more fun and more self-respect in having a One-Eyed Ogre to do it. Nowadays the "clear light of knowledge" shows that none of these things can happen any more; even denies that they ever did happen, and so removes the ray of hope that what has happened once may happen again. As folklore died, the interest of people centered on the game of war; and as wars went out of fashion, the only adventure left was crime.

So we came to the gentleman burglar story, from the realistic beginning in *Jonathan Wild* to the romantic climax in *Raffles* and *Arsène Lupin.* It is only in the last thirty years that snobbery has obtained so complete a strangle-grip, so that these common cheats and thieves are described as "such perfect gentlemen."

It is impossible to depict the sodden hopelessness of the English for the past ten years. The atmosphere has been depressing beyond potassium bromide. Everybody had a remedy, socialism (one man one kind of socialism), diet reform, dress reform, every type of vague irrelevant quack nostrum. Only a poet or a philosopher here and there recognized the symptoms of the disease, and diagnosed it as the melancholia caused by impotence. The joy of life had fled utterly away, and was no

more. "Merrie England," its boys and girls dancing round the Maypole, was dead. The Puritans had removed that "stynnkynge ydolle." Great Pan was dead, and an exceeding bitter cry tore the throats of the children. They were to be forbidden the unique pleasure of life, the one thing that makes it worth living, the exercise of the creative faculty. For only in this does man re-enter heaven, and feel himself once more manifest as the image of God. So whether this faculty is used on the physical plane as love, or on the spiritual plane as art or religious ecstasy, it is forbidden in England. The great secret of autocracy is that "religion" and "morals" are only fetters for common folk. Hence the distrust of poets such as Shelley, who wanted all men to be free to love. More recently, Wilde threatened to popularize the Oxonian type of "immorality," and was crushed.

"We come even unto the New Chapel and Thou didst bear away the Holy Grail beneath Thy Druid vestments.

"Secretly and by stealth did we drink of the informing sacrament. "Then a terrible disease seized upon the folk of the grey land; and we rejoiced."

So speaks one of the Holy Books of the initiates of a certain secret cult. The disease is presumably boredom; the monotony of life. Even the hope of so exciting an experience as Billy Sunday's hell has been ravished from the parched lips of a multitude too listless even to enjoy the thrill of fear.

It is not of such stuff that revolutions are made. The proverb says that they cannot be made with rosewater; and ditchwater is worse. The history of the spirit is that of a nerve or a muscle; when it is teased it reacts, for a certain time, more and more strenuously. After that time it tires, until not even the greatest shock can stir it. Under the oppression of the Tudors the manhood of England was in no wise diminished; you had only to whisper "The King of Spain," and somebody jumped right up and singed his beard. The spirit of the

nation was indeed so high that a very trifling tax precipitated revolution; and, if I understand American history, George Washington revolted because they charged him thirty cents for a cup of English Breakfast Tea. But with a Callipyge so ponderous as Queen Victoria on the safety-valve, even modern England might have exploded. No; for the wily old lady, before taking her seat, had used the precaution to let down the fires. Her sodden sentimentality, her cotton-wool prudery, her spineless morality, and her suety religion made England chaste as Klingsor, and honest as an Armless Wonder.

Have you ever observed the effects of the torture called Vigiliarum? It is a very simple experiment to perform. All you have to do is to take a man and exhaust him; then, when he begins to fall asleep, interfere with the process. At first he resents it; for a time this becomes more acute; presently it diminishes, until the man is like a log, and no longer responds to any stimulus. You would think your fun was over; but no! After a certain period the victim suddenly discharges a certain reserve of force in his brain; he starts up a murderous maniac with the strength of fifty men, and unless you have previously secured him in an adequate manner, your trifle of science may prove extremely dangerous.

This condition has already been seen on one occasion; the French Revolution. There was no clear unity of purpose or idea in that frenzy; the blind giant in his agony struck at foe and friend alike. It was just the utter helplessness of the beast, the lack of constructive thought, that made his rage so dangerous. The moment that Napoleon's master mind seized it and harnessed it, imposed his will on it, France became sane again. The dogmas of Jacobinism were forgotten in five years; a simple, sensible, practical code based on the facts of life instead of on abstract principles of "Justice" was accepted as a matter of course, and has survived not only the other half of Bonapartism, but several distinct types of revolution.

Let us see whether we can discover any parallel between the France of 1793 and the England of today. England had been reduced to the penultimate stage in 1900. The Boer War did not arouse the martial spirit. Lloyd George without a qualm fastened the last fetters on the limbs of the workmen; he hardly needed the velvet of old-age pensions to cover the cold iron. He labelled the slave, made him keep his own record, and even made him help to pay for it.

With a pace stately and fast
Over English land he past,
Trampling to a mine of blood
The adoring multitude.

And now there comes a real war. One might have expected the whole nation to flame into arms. Not a bit of it! The piteous posters, idly watched by cigaretted loungers, or read dully by the stolid, contemptuous, hopeless eyes of the men-slaves to whom toil had become the only thing in life, pleaded and still plead like bedraggled charity beggars. The press set the trumpet to its lips and blew; all we heard was a squeak like a rag doll's. The fact is that the people did not want the war. Even the violent anti-German *John Bull,* the weekly with the largest circulation in England, came out at the time of the Austrian ultimatum with the placard "To Hell with Servia." Its editor, Horatio Bottomley, is probably the most popular man in the country among the lower middle and working classes and of all politicians most sure and quick to apprehend and to express the silent thought of the average man. Once the die was cast, he shouted with the biggest crowd, like Mr Pickwick, and roared to beat Bottom himself. But his first mood was the genuine thought.

The idea of fighting on behalf of the miserable assassins of Serajevo seemed to everybody the last word in madness. But even when the tale of the invasion of

Belgium came to London, when rape, mutilation, cannibalism, and torture filled the columns of the papers, did the people turn a hair? They cared exactly nothing. They probably believed the lies of the press; but did not see how it concerned them. They were very annoyed because it interfered with the traditional holiday season; but all they felt was just the dull resentment of a sleeping man in a railway carriage when a jolt half wakes him. Now this was all wrong. It showed nervous exhaustion, the last stage before mania. For, believing those press lies, the healthy reaction should have been a giant rage to avenge humanity, and crush the "barbarous Huns." The spirit of manhood should have flamed up like Peter when they came to arrest his Master. Instead, the idea of the man in the street was to let France and Russia do the fighting. The sending of the little expeditionary force (to its inevitable annihilation) was regarded as a work of supererogation, a particularly sporting thing to do. The navy of course would take the necessary police measures. At a chosen spot on the North Sea the German fleet would be surrounded and blown out of the water. Jolly old Jellicoe would go into battle with the signal "Today's the day" and die in the arms of Lord Charles Beresford at the moment of victory with the remark, "Dear old Charlie."

But fight ourselves? Not much. Bad enough having to pay three times the usual price for Potassium Bichromate to color "Tomato Soup" with; fighting be damned! Hence the passionate, almost Evangelical, belief in the one and a half million Russians who were being transported through the country, with the secrecy and dispatch of the telegraph service! I used to point out that Archangel is served by a single line of railway, and that to move even 10,000 troops would take six weeks at least. I might have saved my breath. The name Archangel suggested Michael, I suppose, and everybody knows the grand Duke Michael.[1]

The White Feather campaign, the hogwash of Harold Begbie, Wells, Bennett, and the Waterloo Bridge Road school of literature in general, the crazily hysterical appeals of the war posters, the sexual inducements, all fell flat. (In the meanwhile France and Germany were methodically, silently, adequately organized for war with no more discord than exists in a well-trained football team.)

The practical men gave up the voluntary idea. England would not wake up; it must be kicked up. (Of course, it was the fault of previous governments. They had deliberately set themselves to break the manhood of the people; and it is stupid to curse one's bullock for his failure at stud.) So Mr Lloyd George put on his shooting boots, and prepared to kick. Senator Beveridge describes the situation in language which I cannot hope to better:

So acutely was the government embarrassed in conducting the war because of shortage of material and equipment, that toward the middle of March the most drastic and autocratic law ever passed by any legislative body in British history was enacted. Broadly speaking, this law gave the government absolute power to take over and conduct the whole or any part of the industry of Great Britain.

The factories were not turning out proper quantities of munitions. Ship-building firms were working on private contracts. There had been no general voluntary adjustment of manufacturing to changed conditions, as in Germany and France.

But, while employers were blamed for selfishness and profit hunger, the weightiest blows of censure fell upon the heads of British laborers. Thus the government armed itself with Czar-like powers of compulsion over British industry.

The government considered this revolutionary statute so necessary that Mr Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, assured the House of Commons that "the success of the war depends upon it." Lord Kitch-

ener, from his place in the House of Lords, told Parliament and the nation that military operations had "been seriously hampered by the failure to obtain skillful labor and by delays in the production of the necessary plants"; and, complaining of labor indifference and trade-unions' restrictions, he grimly declared that the Commandeering bill, as this extreme socialistic measure was popularly called, was "imperatively necessary."

The newspapers were swift to see and frank to state the profound change which this law wrought in British conditions; and justified it only upon the ground of deadly emergency. The *Daily Mail* said that the law established "a sort of industrial dictatorship."

The *Daily Express* asserted that "The new bill is, of course, State Socialism. That must be accepted."

The *Daily Express,* in discussing another subject announced that: "Parliamentary government has temporarily come to an end in Great Britain."

That was in March. At the end of July the situation is nothing bettered but is rather grown worse. It really never occurred to people that this was going to be anything but a war toy, with corpses complete, in box, five shillings and sixpence. So the nation drifted to a point where even its powdered and plushed lackeys in the American press could not conceal the whole truth. Here is part of an editorial from the lickspittle New York *Times.*

The English Labor Crisis

The British Government has served its ultimatum on English labor. To the utmost limit of their capacity the factories producing war munitions must have efficient workmen, willing to do full time and no "slacking." The leaders of organized labor have undertaken in seven days to raise a volunteer army of workmen sufficient to supply the Government's demands. If they fail, the Government will have to consider compulsion.

That is the ultimatum delivered by David Lloyd George in the speech with which he introduced in the

House of Commons the so-called War Munitions Bill, a measure which in effect imposes martial law upon so much of British industry as the needs of war require. Besides providing for a volunteer army of workmen to man the factories, who shall enlist like soldiers but wear no uniforms, the bill makes strikes and lockouts illegal, and creates local boards, composed of employers and employees, half and half, presided over by Government Chairmen, which shall sit as final courts; almost like courts-martial, to settle all disputes as to wages, hours, and profits, and suspend any trade-union rules that tend to limit output. That is the crux of the whole matter. Nothing shall be tolerated that limits output.

Thus comes at last to a head a situation which has occasioned profound chagrin in England.

Military men are for dressing labor in khaki by force and making it subject to discipline, as soldiers are. To this Arnold Bennett acutely retorts: "You won't change the nature of Clyde men by calling them conscripts. Supposing a shopful of conscripts down tools, what are you going to do? Shoot them? Try it. The dream of getting skilled labor and continuous industry by compulsion is full of nothing but the gravest social danger."

The sense of that is obvious. You can compel a capitalist to operate his plant on Government orders at full capacity merely by threat of taking possession of it; but you cannot compel a skilled workman to work his best, to work full time, to work for certain wages, or to work at all. If you threaten to shoot him — why, that is no compulsion. He is not in the Congo. He is in England. The threat will not be executed. So, in one breath the Government threatens compulsion and exhorts him to do his duty. There is still hope that he will respond. There is very grave doubt as to whether he can be requisitioned.

Of course it is not difficult to foresee the course of events. They will not shoot the workman; they will keep on nagging at him. He will suddenly come to the end of

his patience, run amuck, and burn the rags of the British Flag, and of the British Constitution, on the altar of Anarchy.