

1066: A Study of the Ruling Class of England

Originally published in the September 1917 edition of The International.

The first date I ever learnt, and almost the only one that I have never forgotten, is "William the Conqueror, 1066." But most people seem to have omitted this item from their curriculum.

It is customary to think of England as Anglo-Saxon. It is this mistake which leads to all misunderstanding about the kinship of the English with the American. The British government has always been Celtic and not Teutonic. The five Celtic nations, at one time or another, in one way or another, have always come to the front. The Scandinavian and Saxon elements have been made hewers of wood and drawers of water. The paradox is sufficiently curious, since it is the Celts themselves who have been oppressed. But until the time of William III when the kingly power passed to the aristocracy, once and for all, no monarch of other than Norman or Celtic blood sat upon the throne. The Celtic chiefs allied themselves, too, with the Norman nobility.

Now the principal characteristics of the Celt is that he is a mystic; and whenever mysticism condescends to take hold of the common things of life and becomes aggressive, it is the most dangerous of qualities. In the first place, it confers the most extraordinary subtlety; in the second, it puts its possessor right with his conscience. It makes him prince of diplomatists; for he is never so sincere as when he is telling his most elaborate lie. It is quite impossible for the Anglo-American to understand this temperament. All the strength and virtue of the American people lie in that section of the population which is of German origin. The Anglo-Saxon elements were mostly the scouring of the Puritan latrine.

The only other good element in America, and it is not so numerous, consists of the Irish. Most of them seem to have come over actuated by a positive spirit, seeking for freedom. The others had little choice in the matter. It is for this reason that the Irish and Germans have gone ahead so rapidly, and now control most of the government and most of the big business. The purely Anglo-Saxon name is nowhere prominent. Wilson is Lowland Scots. Roosevelt Dutch, Morgan Welch. The deeper one looks into the ancestries of prominent men either here or in England, the more one is struck by the complete absence of the English. Run through the British cabinet today: I think it will puzzle anyone to find a genuinely English name in the whole crowd.

Now, the conception of the most elementary principles of things is radically different in the case of the Celt to what it is in the case of the Saxon. The Saxon idea of law is based on justice. In the Celtic conception it is a device for getting what you want with an appearance of justice. In England in the last twenty years the judges have again and again deliberately misinterpreted the plain intentions of the law, and stultified the House of Commons completely. This does not imply a conflict between the legislative and the judiciary. It is a kind of practical joke, carefully prearranged, in order to fool the people. Take a single, concrete example: Home Rule. The House of Commons passes this bill again and again. And it is always thrown out by the Lords, as Gladstone and all who fathered the bill intended that it should be. The device becomes a little threadbare; so a great agitation is started to destroy the power of the Lords. With infinite pains an act is passed, making the veto of the Peers only temporary. In ninety cases out of a hundred it would never happen that this law came into action at all. The framers of the bill hoped that the majority in the House of Commons would always break up long before the act became operative. By a series of accidents, however, the Irish remained masters of the situation for

the necessary period, and the Home Rule Bill became law over the head of the House of Lords. Nobody minded. A civil war was quietly arranged with the connivance of the military authorities and therefore of the King, and the situation would have been calmed down by the usual massacres, if the British working man had not seen whither these things tended. His political education had been carried too far. He had become capable of reasoning that the same methods to defy the will of the people would be just as applicable when it came to some of his own pet measures. And one of the Labor men got up in the House of Commons and made a speech which thoroughly frightened the government.

The reader will doubtless remember that in the first part of 1914 Ulster was, save for an "if" inserted by the legal mind of Sir Edward Carson, actually in rebellion. It had established a provisional government; it was drilling and arming an army; munitions were being run into the country under the very nose of the British navy. To these facts the Labor member in question called attention. He accused his own government of acquiescing in armed revolt against its own authority, and he intimated that the people would not stand it. The situation now appeared very serious to the ruling classes. They did not mind civil war in Ireland—on the contrary, every little helps—but civil war in England was a very different thing. All sorts of abortive conferences were held, with the idea of persuading the people that something was being done to settle the difficulty. As a fact, it was being discussed: though not at ridiculous conferences, but at the proper places, dinner parties, smoking rooms, and golf clubs. Everybody who was anybody argued that much the best way out of the trouble was a European War. There was nothing in the political situation to make this undesirable. The weak spot in the intellectual grasp of the situation was that nobody recognized the rottenness of Russia. This was because Russia had been

the bogey for so long. So the war was hastily decided upon, and the results lie before us.

The whole of this incident is extraordinarily characteristic of the dominant, aggressive, unscrupulous, super-subtle, mystic minds of the Norman and the Celt. They will find a needle in a haystack, if they have to burn down the haystack to do it.

It is because of this strange temperament that the methods of the English have always been so inscrutable. They have a caste secret, as incommunicable as the divine Tetragram, and as powerful. It has been carefully explained to the world by Rudyard Kipling: but only those who already knew it have been able to understand what he meant. A very illuminating incident is given in one of the early chapters of *Stalky & Co.*, where the headmaster thrashes three boys who have proved their innocence to the hilt. It is one of the essential features of the mind of the Celt that he refuses to take the least notice of facts. He refuses to be bullied by his own reason. It is for this reason that Britain has been so extraordinarily successful in dealing with Orientals. A Hindoo will come along with a wonderful and beautiful story carefully prepared in many months with the utmost subtlety; and then his case will be judged by a boy of twenty-five on some totally different ground. It will be judged justly, too, and the Hindoo will appreciate and respect the moral superiority implied.

When George V was in India he only made one hit, and that was by accident. A particularly important Rajah had come a particularly long distance with a particularly large retinue, to bow before the heir of the great King-Emperor . . . and the latter was too lazy or too hot to notice him. So the Rajah crawled out of the presence, and remarked afterwards, confidentially, that that was something like an emperor! He felt that all his pains had been well repaid by the contempt with which he had been treated; it flattered him that he should have been

in the presence of a person who could practically fail to notice him.

It is this habitual insolence which galls all those who are not prepared to cringe before it. Unless a man has absolute assurance of some equal kind, it is bound to annoy him. And it is so strongly rooted, that death itself seems to bear its impress. It is part of the general scheme, the incomparable code of manners in vogue in England, the idea that a gentleman must never show his feelings. This is of the utmost importance; and of course the corollary is, that one who does show his feelings is no gentleman, except in the case where the feelings in question are assumed. Had the English been really indignant about Belgium, there would never have been a word about it in the newspapers. The indignation with regard to the Lusitania and Edith Cavell was just as factitious. Both incidents pleased enormously, because their effect upon the ingenuous American could not but be admirable.

But this mask is so much part of the face, that the man himself cannot see it even in the looking-glass. At the time when he is showing the feelings, he is apologizing to himself for showing them; he is explaining to himself that unless the circumstances were so hideous and so unprecedented, he would not bat an eyelid. This is not actual hypocrisy. He has taught himself to simulate a mood so well, that he really feels it at the time. It is only when the opportunity arises to do something, that he walks away from the mood, just as a man who has been sitting over the fire all morning suddenly notices that the rain has stopped and the sun is shining, and he instantly goes out for a walk. So one sees in private life the most apparently hypocritical actions, which are really only temperament. A man loses his wife, and calls heaven and earth to witness to the greatness of his grief, refuses to do his work, is completely upset, visibly, before the eyes of all men . . . when without so much as twenty-four hours' warning he marries someone else.

Incidentally he has had from two to six mistresses in full blouse all the time. Conduct of this kind staggers all other nations. Moreover, it makes them rather afraid. They never know where they are. Hence the term "Perfide Albion." To this day in France it is the Normans and, to a much less extent, the Gascons who have this reputation, or something rather like it. A Norman horsedealer will unblushingly rob an American of his last maravedi.

I do not think that there is anything in the world so subtle and so strong as this peculiar caste feeling which obtains in the ruling classes of England. You can recognize a public school boy (in the event of this article being read by savages, it will be perhaps best to explain, that in England "public school" does not mean a place of free, elementary education, but a highly privileged and exclusive institution, very expensive, where nothing whatever is allowed to be taught except the Secret of Government) forty years afterwards, when drink has brought him to sell matches in the gutter. He never altogether loses a peculiar power which is apparently only conferred by the application of various instruments of flagellation by that caste within a caste, the head-masters. It is absolutely impossible to convey to the American mind what one means by a head-master. He is utterly different in kind, not only in degree, from all other masters. It is almost unheard-of for a house-master to become Head in the same school. He is often quite a young man. But he is certainly not of the same flesh and blood as other men.

The same idea is carried out in the universities. The vice-chancellors of Oxford and Cambridge are the most absolute monarchs in Europe, and the strongest testimonial that one can bring to the quality of the spirit which makes the English what they are is that the authority of the vice-chancellor is never brought in question. Professors are often unpopular: the master of a college is sometimes the subject of attacks: but the vice-

chancellor could expel the whole university and hardly arouse comment. If the vice-chancellor were abolished, the masters of colleges would begin to acquire some of his immunities.

Now, in this extraordinary respect and obedience, there is no idea of subservience. It is part of the game to suffer at the hands of the proper person, if it is only one's house prefect. The individual realizes himself as part of the governing machine, really very much more strongly than has now been done with Germany, where the humblest official has been taught to regard himself as an essential cog in the clock of state. But the Englishman's is not an honest pride that he is helping on the good work. There is a very devilish quality, a sardonic joy, in his position. He feels himself an honored member of the great conspiracy against the world. This attitude accounts for the superior smile of recognition with which members of this truly secret society greet each other. Observe a couple of Englishmen, strangers to each other, perhaps even disliking each other at first sight, at a party in New York. There is an immediate understanding, an unspeakable contempt for all the Americans present, which they do not even try to hide, and which, being the grossest possible form of rudeness, naturally annoys. They may have every kind of antagonism for each other, these two men; but they could and would act in perfect harmony, without word spoken, against the rest of the world, if the emergency arose.

The trouble in which England now finds herself is partially due to the gradual decadence of this system. The idiotic "intellectuals" have been a terrible nuisance. And the death of Edward VII was of course an absolutely stunning blow. George V has none of the qualities required in an English king. He is therefore being left to the management of Mary, and we hear nothing of him, except when he falls off his horse and hurts himself, which is one of the things that no king can do. Various

stories have been circulated about this humiliating accident; but the world may rest assured that, had it been anything honorable, there would have been more fuss made than when Achilles conquered Hector. "Why then," the reader will ask, "did not the press bureau, so fertile in invention, hasten to invent something very beautiful about him?" Because it is no part of the policy of the rulers of England to praise this shadow of a king. He is despised and detested by everyone for his weakness, his imbecility, his grotesque physical appearance, and all the rest of it. We do not want this man to reign over us. And for this reason he is subtly discredited in every convenient way. On the whole I think that the old spirit is strong enough to win its particular battle, which is not in the least against Germany. On the contrary, the Hohenzollern spirit, as opposed to the German spirit, has many points of great similarity. The Hohenzollerns are of course no more Teutons than the Fijians are. As a further illustration, we shall see how the existence of this secret explains some otherwise quite inexplicable problems like Lloyd George, the natural successor of Joe Chamberlain.

Lloyd George is nobody. He might be made king-emperor, and he would still be nobody. He is a solicitor from Wales; nobody quite knows who his father was; and he doesn't count. He is very useful for the moment. He got an act through Parliament which reduced the working classes to the level of galley-slaves. They were branded like so many cattle by the government itself. Just now, munitions are wanted, and he is very useful to boom the supply. But all the while, though every one is praising him and saying: "Ah, yes, there is the man for prime minister! There is the great genius! There is the savior of the country!" we are saying quietly to ourselves that he is just a splash of mud, to be wiped off our trousers by our valets, when we return from our stroll on this damp morning.

The possession of the secret is the one passport to success in England. If you have this, you can go anywhere and do anything; you may make a perfect cad of yourself and commit all the crimes in the calendar. But as long as you do not do anything "un-masonic"—to borrow from the craft the only word which hints at one's meaning, since this greater craft has been so clever in the matter of secrecy that they have even taken care not to invent a word to mean it—so long are you "possible." An obvious example is the immunity of Alfred Douglas. Here, in spite of innumerable violations of the law of the most outrageous kind, both by him and his enemies, no prosecutions ever take place. A ring is kept for the antagonists, and very good sport they have given us in the last ten years or so. The whole thing is a family quarrel, just like the European war. As soon as education and progress have been knocked on the head, we shall all be good friends again.

On lookers never understood why Wilde was disgraced. It was because he was popularizing one of the secrets of the aristocracy, a disgusting thing to do, when you are just trying to gain admission to it. Wilde was letting the uninitiated know what the initiated did. The church, the army, the bar, the Houses of Parliament, are packed with people who practice strange vices. The head-master of Eton, in quashing some vulgarian's complaint the other day, said that "it mattered no more than the measles." But this is one of the things which it doesn't pay to advertise, at least not in the way Wilde did. In spite of this he was given every chance. He was furnished with a thousand pounds in gold and told that the "two-twenty" (from London to Paris) would not be watched. But he misunderstood the nature of his power. He thought he was an important person, whereas his only claim to consideration was that he had an inkling of the secret.

No person is important in the English system. Every one who violates the code is thrown to the wolves with-

out a moment's hesitation, and nobody ever knows why. The protection afforded to anyone who does behave properly, on the other hand, is absolute. The most damning indictments may be prepared; the public prosecutor will never act upon them. If he were absolutely forced to do so, the man would be given a chance to get away; or some wonderful technical flaw would be discovered, which would prevent the business from ever becoming public. Parnell and Dilke were destroyed because they were irreconcilable.

It is of course impossible to explain in so many words exactly what you can't do. There is no Penal Code in England. There is nothing which is "*verboden*." You cannot make sure of keeping within the law in England—you cannot even make sure of breaking it. The one essential is the instinctive knowledge of right and wrong (in the English sense) conferred by a public school and university training, or Sandhurst, or something equivalent. Even in these degenerate days money is not very important. A penniless subaltern with the secret is stronger than a millionaire without it.

Observe what happened to the harmless, good natured Hooley. He gave ten thousand pounds' worth of gold plate to St. Paul's, and it did him no good at all. You cannot buy the favor of the English. They are utterly unbribable. What you want to be able to do is to tell the story of the scholar of Trinity who, running down to chapel in the morning from his first all-night wine party, appealed to the Dean: "I can't read the lesson, sir, this bloody duck won't keep still!" (Readers resident in Sze-chuen, Tonga, and the Cameroons are hereby informed that the reference was to the eagle of the lecturer.) If it seems not antecedently improbable that you were present on that historic occasion, you may steal the crown-jewels, and become prime minister.

I remember one quite small but characteristic incident, illustrative of the way things are done. The son of a church furnisher who had somehow got into Trinity,

had been horsewhipped by me for telling lies about me, and he complained to my tutor, Dr. A. W. Verrall, who was of course bound by his office to rebuke me. So he "halled" me, which, being interpreted, is, wrote to me to call on him; and when I got there informed me baldly on the complaint, changed the subject immediately—without awaiting an answer—to the merits of Ibsen, introduced a remark about the desuetude of duelling, went on at once to something else, and asked me to dinner. He had complied with his duty, without doing it; and that is the sort of way in which all such things are treated. All legality, all formality, are absolutely taboo. They are only brought forward in order to conceal some crime. Witness the Jameson raid. The officers has to be punished in some sort of way. But it was made as mild as possible, and it was also atoned for by all sorts of advantages of other kind and any amount of kudos. If the raid had been a success, there would have been no difficulty for them at all.

On the other hand, the smallest indication on your part of ill-will towards the system, and you are ground down without respect of place or person. One of the most distinguished publicists in England took it into his head to run a South African mining magnate to earth. Libel actions and other forms of argument were started against him, but as he was evidently able and ready to fight, postponement after postponement took place. He saw they were afraid of him, and became a little self-confident. He went off for a holiday; and in his absence another man was attacked in his paper, this time a person of real importance. Prosecution was started, not by the person libeled, but by the authorities themselves, the charge being that he had commented upon a case before the courts in such a way as to prejudice justice. The printer and publisher apologized nicely, and were dismissed with a few kind words. The publicist himself does not seem to have realized that it was a frame-up against him, something in the nature of a kindly warning

that he was sailing to near the wind. He refused to "play the game"—to apologize for something which he had not done.

He was immediately committed for contempt of court, thrown into prison, and brutally ill-treated. He was supposed to be a first-class misdemeanant, but the rules of the prison itself were violated in order to annoy him. This was simply because he wanted to insist upon his rights. There are no rights in England. There are only privileges. Luckily for him, a friendly warder told him that there was no limit to what they could do to him, unless he changed his tone. It is perfectly possible to administer death by torture in an English prison without causing comment. A warder has only to annoy a prisoner until he retorts. The warder then says that he was threatened and is afraid of his life. The prisoner can then be put in irons, and the irons can be fixed in such a position that he goes off his head in a few hours from the tortures of cramp. This is only one of twenty different methods of insuring peace and harmony within the dungeon walls. The publicist was wise enough to modify his tone to some extent, but he still refused to apologize for an act for which he was not responsible, and it was only when they were at last convinced that his life was in immediate danger that they grudgingly let him out. The conduct of this man may appear praiseworthy to some; but to others it will appear wrong-headed.

To the present writer (for example) there is no sense in refusing to apologize for what you have not done. If it is something that you have done, stand for it by all means; but how can something that you have not done concern you? If you are playing a game, play it according to the rules. If the judge wants you to swear that black is white, go into the box and swear it. If he then says: "No, black is black! Swear that!"—do so. If he then proposes to commit you for perjury, explain that, overawed by the majesty of the court, you became

bewildered and did not quite know what you were saying. It is all very well to be a martyr if you have devoted your life to destroying some particular form of tyranny. But even so, do not waste that life on side-issues. These two examples are characteristic of the ethics expected from those who would flourish in the shade of the oak trees of old England.

Quite in keeping is the political game which people outside England regard with such wonder. Sir Archibald Montfort gets up in the House of Commons and tells Lord Algernon Fitzsimmons that he is a cad, a black-guard, a liar, a thief, a traitor, and wants to impeach him. Lord Algernon replied in terms of even greater violence. The debate closes; they go out together, have dinner at the club, and spend the evening amicably playing billiards. It is not exactly that they did not mean what they said; it is rather that they meant it in a limited way, in a way pertaining to the "universe of discourse" of politics, one having no bearing whatever on the real things of life.

At the basis of this is the most profound and complete system of immorality which the world has ever seen. A man may do anything except be caught cheating at cards, and one or two things of the same order; and it will not interfere with, say, his marrying. Marriage is a serious business, having to do with settlements, estates, and property generally. Morals have no importance whatsoever. Oscar Wilde understood this secret very well, and constantly indicates it in his plays. In fact, nearly all the humor of his plays depends upon the treatment of this peculiar convention. Of course, a woman must not be divorced, because here questions of legitimacy arise, and therefore questions of property; there is therefore a real sin against the code. Nor is it well for any one, man or woman, to be an open and notorious evil liver; because that is giving away the secret. Morality is the principal fetter of the lower classes, and they must not find out that their masters always do ex-

actly what takes their fancy, without a moment's regard for any other consideration.

In the older days religion had equal importance; in fact, greater importance. And in those times atheism was a sin against the caste. Hence the persecution of Bradlaugh. But the advance of science, and the efforts of the Rationalist Press Association, have made the British pretense of religion impossible for anyone of intelligence. The clearer sighted have seen that that cock won't fight. It is only in the country districts, where education is still at neap, that the squire and the parson still work together. It is well known that the British Cabinet just before the war contained three avowed atheists. The educated man in the working classes—and there are plenty of him, nowadays—is likely to despise his masters if he thinks them Christians. He is consequently told: "Observe, here are Morley and the rest, who admit they think as you do." The others of course really think the same, but make a pretense of religion for the sake of their women, and so on. The Church of England is even stronger as a political machine than the Greek Church. Its basis is so frankly illogical, that it is hardly possible to defend it; and for this reason anything that seemed like a real religion, which had any basis of real enthusiasm, was extremely taboo. Atheism itself is, of course, a kind of religion. And while nobody in the least minded practical atheism, even on the part of the working classes, it was quite impossible to tolerate an atheist propaganda of radical reform.

But with continuing years a subtler method has become necessary. All parties have had to play at reform, and the game (explained above) by which all such measures are stultified was adopted. Old Age Pensions, the Shops Act, and the Insurance Act, are really amazing masterpieces of chicanery. All the propertied classes united to pretend the bitterest opposition to these measures, and the proletariat imagined a great triumph when they were passed. The actual effect of these

measures was to remove every shred of independence from the workman. If he went one step beyond the bounds of the most slavish subservience to his employer, if he were not steady and patient as an ass, he risked losing his pension. The Shops Act prevented him from rising in life, principally by limiting the number of hours in which he could work, under the pretense of care for his poor, dear health. And the Insurance Act furnished a kind of automatic black-list, at the service of every employer in the country. A man was no longer able to change his job. In other words, his servitude has been accomplished . . . strictly in his own interest.

There is no doubt in my mind, there can be no doubt in the mind of any person who understands history, that these measures will be successful. The privileged classes will be strengthened, not weakened, by the war. The army will not lend itself to revolution. All the economic forces of Europe will unite to prevent things going too far. No one knows better than the Kaiser that the break-up of the English system would spell ruin for the fortunes of his house. He would feel just as George III did with regard to the French Revolution. The navy would obviously fight for the privileged classes, and revolutionaries in England could be starved into surrender in a fortnight without need of striking blood, much less of importing foreign mercenaries, as has been done on previous occasions when need was.

England's handicap so far has been her over-subtlety and over-confidence. The power of the lawyer did certainly become too great, and it has taken all these months for the silent pressure of the real rulers to become properly manifest. This is the explanation of the stiffening of the blockade. It is still, however, a little difficult to tell how things will go in the immediate future. A sudden peace with Germany, an arrangement for the two victorious powers to come together and share the spoils without fighting each other any further about them, seems as probable as anything. It is at

least certain that the only people who possess any interest in England are fully alive to it, and is not to be supposed that the spirit which has ruled since 1066, becoming ever stronger and subtler with the centuries, is going to be overwhelmed by the storm it created in order to sweep away that opposition to it, which had risen owing to the readjustments of society necessitated by the discoveries of science.

Floreat Etona!