

LIFTING THE MASK FROM ENGLAND

By Aleister Crowley

THINGS are by no means pleasant, either between the Allies themselves or even between the heterogeneous components of "Kitchener's Kippers." The English despise and distrust the French; the old story about the rout of Mons being caused by the non-appearance of two French armies is still current. The reason of it is variously given as treachery resulting in the shooting of two French generals, failure to receive orders, and various other causes. But the feeling remains that the French did fail to support them, however it may have happened. And as the British expedition was pretty well wiped out, one can understand the soreness of the feeling. On the French side is the deep-seated, inherited distrust of "perfidious Albion." Every Frenchman knows instinctively that if a moment should ever arrive when it would be to England's interest to quit or change sides, she would not hesitate for a moment.

There is also infinite jealousy between British and Colonial troops. The Colonials are contemptuous of discipline and "boiled collars," and each man fancies himself a hero. The British retaliate by contempt of the provincialisms of the Colonials. But worse than all this is the absolute conviction of Scotch, Irish and Welsh troops, as well as of all the Colonial troops, that they are deliberately sacrificed in battle, in order to spare the English regiments. History, of course, abounds in instances where this has been done. In some cases Celtic regiments have been deliberately shelled by their own artillery. You cannot expect men to fight if they suspect this sort of thing. The feeling in South Wales among the miners against conscription is almost entirely due to the idea that the Government would be very pleased if their numbers were reduced by 50 per cent. or so. The feeling in Ireland is, of course, well known. It is this absence of solidarity in the nation, or rather nations, which has been the eternal stumbling-block. This more than any other is the reason that conscription has become necessary.

Another reason for the unpopularity of the service was the complete incompetence and even carelessness shown by the Government in the early days of the war, with regard to providing creature comforts for the men. The usual red tape has also been employed to a devastating extent in the drawing of allowances. Women who can hardly read and write have been bombarded with forms which would puzzle a college professor, and expected to fill them out satisfactorily. The restrictions on drink have caused even greater trouble. Similar remarks apply to the questions of sexual morality. It is no good to appeal to people on the ground that they are high-spirited patriots, possessing all the virtues, when at the same time you are treating them as if they were the lowest criminals, wallowing in every possible vice.

During my stay I was naturally the centre of a great deal of interest, as having spent so long in America. Every one was anxious to know the real attitude of the American public toward the war. I explained that the national characteristics had not in any way been altered by the Atlantic. The Anglo-Saxon was all volubility, sentimentality, and slop. Snobbishness, hypocrisy, and money-bags were the three persons in his trinity. The Irish were jubilant, feeling that the hour of revenge for their long martyrdom had struck at last; but were content to wait and work in the dark for a little longer. The Teutons (I continued) said little. If one judged from the volumes of talk one would imagine that nine Americans in ten hated Germany. But the Teuton, realizing that acrimonious conversation does no particular damage, keeps his breath to cool his porridge. I said I regarded it as certain that America could not openly enter the war without political disruption, possibly of a very violent character. The more thoughtful of those who discussed the matter with me seemed to regard these considerations as an excuse for President Wilson. There was also the argument that America was helping the Allies more by staying out, than she could do by going in. But everywhere I met the same ingrained assumption that there were no two sides to the question; and those who, being incapable of anything but the most superficial thought, reacted simply to facts without consideration of what they might imply, merely overflowed with vulgar abuse.

I found one man, however, who appeared fairly well acquainted with the real situation in America. "The whole affair," he said to me, "is evidently politics and graft. Wilson does not mean to get into trouble at any price, because he knows that it would mean his political ruin. He sends these idiotic notes to us and the Germans, merely in the hope of catching votes. The fatuity of his whole proceeding is obvious. Neither we nor Germany are foolish enough to take any notice of him. The old dog has no teeth; and if he had, he would not dare bite. Why do not the Teutons avoid these tedious diplomatic exchanges by painting their torpedoes in plain letters: 'Peace on Earth, Good-will towards Men.' 'I should hate to be misunderstood.' 'With the compliments of the season,' 'To show our affection for America,' and re-christen the U-boats 'Oscar III,' 'IV,' and so on? What the Yankees do not understand is, that this little scrap with Germany is only a family quarrel. We are mostly of the same blood, our royalties are closely related, our languages are cognate, our interests are not particularly conflicting. We shall very soon kiss and make friends and proceed to recoup ourselves—by taking over North and South America as going concerns. Wilson's blundering diplomacy has given both of us every excuse for making war when it suits our convenience. The British and German Navy are both entirely unimpaired, neither of us have lost a single capital ship, and if necessary we could send over an invading force, not of a few hundred thousand men, as their alarmists diffidently suggest, but of just as many million as might be necessary to reduce the whole continent to the status of a conquered province. In any case, that is the only natural state for them. They have lost all idea of liberty. Look at their Blue Laws and their Lizzie Laws. Look at how they permit themselves to be exploited by people with no moral or social superiority, but merely greater skill in robbery. Look at the way in which they endure our impudence, which is far greater than any Germany has given them. Trust me, we'll make another India of the U. S. A." The ignorance and bad taste of these remarks are positively alarming, when one considers that the man who uttered them has an international reputation as a thinker. Evidently the war has been too much for his poor mind.

I had only been about ten days in London when my psychological studies were definitely interrupted in a manner wholly unexpected. I asked an old friend named Carruthers to join me in a chop at the Club, and we had reached the coffee (fortunately) before the waiter appeared and informed me that a gentleman was waiting to see me on business. I guessed that the blow had fallen, and went out as a sheep to slaughter. I was right. A very polite individual introduced himself as Inspector Simpson; but instead of placing gyves upon my wrists, he merely hoped that I was well, and could he have the pleasure of a few minutes' conversation with me? I was, of course, only too delighted. He then said that the Government was not at all angry with me; they did not wish to prosecute me, oh dear, no, far from us be any such thought! I realized for the fifteen-hundred-and-forty-first time in my life the inestimable value of family connections and close friends in high places. I told him, however, as in duty bound, that I should glory in suffering for the truth. He reminded me that this was England, and that the truth would never appear. I had no further remarks to make. "Well, I said, "What can I do for you? If you don't want to prosecute me—what is it? Do you want to make me Foreign Secretary? You might do worse. I would have the boys out of the trenches by Easter. It only needs a little give and take, a little common-sense." No, he said, the position was this: Averse as they were to any public scandal, the press would certainly get wind of my presence in London, and embarrass the Government by insisting upon making a fuss. He therefore proposed to call for me in his automobile at eight o'clock the following morning and wish me Godspeed.

I asked him whether he could not postpone the journey for twenty-four hours, as I had some very important business to settle