

CURRENT MAGAZINES

The Case of the "Action Francaise":—Don Luigi Sturzo, in the *Review of Reviews East to West*:—Rabindranath Tagore in the *Atlantic*.

Nicholas II of Russia:—Dr. Hagberg Wright in the *Quarterly*.

France's True Economic Condition:—Mr. Sisley Huddleston in the *Contemporary*.

A Mistake about the Future:—Mr. J. B. Priestley in *Harper's*.

DURING the last ten months a furious war has been raging in Paris between the party known as *L'Action Francaise* and the representatives of the French Church. It began last fall with a speech by the Cardinal-Archbishop of Bordeaux, in which the journal of the party was accused of teaching atheism. Since then, the feud has proceeded so far that the London *Review of Reviews* obtained for a recent issue a careful statement of the whole affair by an eminent Italian Catholic, Don Luigi Sturzo, who is head of the "Italian Popular Party." As the dispute casts light on internal French politics at least as much as upon Church questions, it may be of interest to summarize its main features presented by one who writes with such authority.

Action Francaise is not only the name of an organization, but also the name of the paper in which that organization expresses itself. The editor is M. Charles Maurras, who replied to the Cardinal's attack in a long personal letter to the Pope. It was at the same time suggested that His Holiness was poorly informed about affairs in France, that he was subject to German influence, and that he had been betrayed into meddling with what was no concern of faith and morals, but just an issue in French politics. The official journal of the Vatican replied that on religious and moral grounds, with which party politics had nothing to do, the papal condemnation had been based. M. Maurras then became bolder, declared on behalf of his paper that "We cannot submit", and branded the New Year's Day speech by the Papal Nuncio at Paris as inspired by the enemies of France. The *Action Francaise*, together with many of the editor's books, was forthwith placed on the Index of prohibited publications, and French Catholics were forbidden under penalty to be members of the league which M. Maurras represents.

It is pointed out by Don Luigi Sturzo that the scheme of political action which the prohibited journal recommends cannot be reconciled with Catholic piety. It has advised, for example, an indifference to the character of the means used, so long as the royalist cause is served, and M. Maurras himself has been prosecuted for inciting to the murder of a French minister. In his novels and articles, too, he has avowed himself a pagan. Even where this has not been made explicit, it has been the "logical presupposition and guiding principle" of his contributions to his journal. If he has apparently been in alliance with the French Catholics in their protest against secularism and radicalism, this has been because such temporary attack on causes he really approves is at the same time an attack on a Government he desires to overthrow. It had become time for the Church to tell him, fairly and squarely, *non tali auxilio*. For the royalist organization was making considerable headway in the universities, and the assistance of M. Maurras even against republican laws which the Church abhors would be bought too dear at the price of his insidious corruption of the minds of youth. His doctrine that the true Catholic should be first and foremost an agitator for the House of Orleans must be branded as false. The Church cannot allow herself to be made a mere instrument for a cause which is at bottom pagan:

German paganism invoked the God of German Christians; French paganism invokes the God of French Catholics; both paganisms being penetrated and pervaded by the spirit of oligarchy, by belief in the value of force and by the instinct of domination.

This is a clear statement of the issue. So long as M. Maurras and his group are devoted to a French Nationalism which would set up an oligarchy at home, accentuate militarism abroad, rake together the dying embers of international hatred, foil every attempt to rebuild the structure of European friendliness, the Church will not accept at their hands any hypocritical service to other and better causes which, as a mere temporary expedient, they might further.

The party known as *Action Francaise* has indeed a curious record. As an organized political group, it is just thirty years old. No one is better qualified to define its purpose than M. Georges Chatterton-Hill, who writes as an intense sympathiser:

The Association in question has as its object to galvanize into life the latent antipathy of many people for the Republic, to unite as it were in a single sheaf all the individual movements of revolt, and to place the forces thus collected and organized in the service of the King of France.

The King of France? And who, pray, is that? It must be a person unknown to international diplomats. Like the successive Stuart pretenders who kept their mimic court abroad, like Grand Duke Cyril who still holds the allegiance of Tsarist émigrés, like the ex-Kaiser who at Doorn is saluted by his entourage with all the pomp and circumstance of days gone by for ever—so there is even yet a Bourbon round whom the enthusiasm of French monarchists continues to entwine itself. Though exiled and unnoticed by the great world, he is still "King of France". And the *Action Francaise* exists to bring him back.

In fierce revolt against the advice of Pope Leo XIII, given ten years earlier, that French Catholics should "rally" to the republican constitution of their native land, these professed sons of the Church began to labour in season and out of season to make republican government unworkable. On every issue of their paper stands a motto lauding the pretender,—*heritier des quarante rois qui en mille ans firent la France*. They have their campaign of lectures, their publishing house, their students' associations, their women's auxiliaries, their *camelots du roi* who specialize in the disturbance of gatherings at which a republican monument is unveiled and in creating disorder at all commemorations of the Great Revolution. One principal evidence of their spirit was shown lately in the obvious rejoicing of their journal at the collapse of their country's currency in the money markets of the world. A curious spectacle indeed! One feels that under the republic there must at least be immense toleration of free thought and free speech. Excepting only the "Confédération Générale du Travail", which so threatened Paris in 1906 that it was necessary to import some sixty thousand troops for protective purposes, one could mention no other menace comparable to that of this league which the Government of France has to face.

Hitherto it has been widely regarded as clerical no less than monarchist, and M. Charles Maurras has been extolled in many quarters for a *quasi* piety. What was long seen by those who read between the lines, is at length made obvious to all. Now, to use a current vulgarism, the cat is out of the bag. Not from any zeal for Catholicism, but because the Church as an organization had such power to help the monarchic purpose, did M. Maurras occasionally simulate a pro-clerical mood. When the papal representative showered his blessings upon Locarno—and even upon the hated M. Briand for that project of world-peace—the *Action Francaise* was beside itself with fury. This quondam organ of the clericals is now imputing every sort of anti-patriotic purpose to

Vatican diplomacy, denouncing the Pope himself as pro-German, raging about that anti-French spirit which it alleges to have been long disguised under the mask of a solicitude for faith and morals, and proclaiming to all its readers that the Frenchman who loves his country must hate his Church.

For some time back a French Catholic friend in Canada has been lending me copies of the *Action Francaise*, whose programme in politics he has warmly favoured. As he is more devoted to his Church than even to the House of Orleans, I await with interest his view of the crisis that has now developed. But I expect no further loans of that interesting and vivacious journal.

IT was Rudyard Kipling who wrote, to the horror of many a Christian missionary, that "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet." Rabindranath Tagore has commented very resentfully upon such a contrast, believing rather in the essential brotherhood of all mankind. But if there must be a conflict, he is prepared to argue that the West cannot monopolise credit. In his recent contribution to *The Atlantic Monthly*, this Hindu poet and seer has shown once again that gift of mordant criticism which has long been so surprising an accompaniment of his mystic genius.

He has suffered a personal affront from the American newspaper press, which seized upon some casual remark he had made,—a remark "whose natural destination", he says, "was time's dustbin." This fugitive whisper has been exaggerated mercilessly, broadcasted to all the world, for the American reporter is like a child with a toy megaphone. And this leads our critic to certain pungent reflections upon that newspaper press which is so very western. Tagore has analysed its spirit. The reporter, he observes, has taken it as his rôle in the world to keep up the ceaseless hubbub of a dust storm. Flowers and rotten leaves are sure of the same sweeping welcome at his hands. Blest with the absence of modern publicity facilities, the East is not afflicted in this way, or at least to this degree. What distinguishes the West is a vast hospitality to the gossip of the hour, with "world-wide organizations of news-pickers and paragraph-makers" to cater for that curiosity about the abnormal which is nothing less than a drug-habit of the "modern" man.

A few interesting examples are quoted. When Tagore was on a lecture tour in the United States some years ago, the rumor was spread that Hindu revolutionaries in San Francisco had decided to assassinate him for his political opinions. He sent a letter to the

press intimating his disbelief in the story, and—as the person concerned—he might have expected this to be communicated to the public. But his letter was never published! Why? Two reasons occur to him. The patriotic American press may have desired to strengthen anti-Hindu feeling on the eve of the legislation against immigrants from Asia, and it was good policy to depict the newcomers as a murder gang. Or, it may have been just unwillingness to rob of its sparkle a pithy paragraph which had such news-value. Mere justice did not count in the editorial decision. Again, shortly after his return to India, Tagore heard of a law-suit in the United States against this Hindu revolutionary group, in the course of which his own name was mentioned. It was alleged that he had taken money from the Germans to act as their propagandist in America! An explanatory cablegram to President Wilson, in which he repudiated such a charge, remained without acknowledgment.

This was in a “democratic” land! It made the Hindu visitor think very hard about the price which one has now to pay for living under popular institutions. The ways of advertisement seemed to him wonderful, but not admirable. He had thoughts about what time has shown to be inherent in democracy:

It makes a deliberate study of the laws of the dark patches in the human intellect, wherewith to help itself to create an atmosphere of delusion through hints, gestures, yells, and startling grimaces, for the purpose of stupefying the popular mind.

And perhaps the grossest of all such exhibitions is during an election:

Once when I was in Chicago, I saw everywhere on the town walls one single name blazoned in big letters in an endless round of repetition, like the whirlwind monotony of a dervish dance that dazes one's mind into vacuity. Evidently the name belonged to some candidate for political election. But what an insult to the people, who are supposed to represent the supreme power in their government, openly to apply to them the spell of hypnotism in place of reason, as the medicine man does in the heart of Africa!

It looks as if Tagore were a dangerous person to provoke into comparisons of East and West, if it is western superiority that you are concerned to establish. Quite lately in that same Chicago he might have witnessed the triumphant campaign of the present mayor, who contrived a tremendous effect by bringing live rats to his platform as representative of his opponents! Not even Dean Inge could surpass Tagore in his pictures of political democracy. And when he writes about modern publicity, one recalls how

Carlyle picked up on a book-stall a volume called *Satan's Invisible World Displayed*, conjecturing that it must be a veracious record of the British newspaper press. Not the United States alone has been thus branded.

Seldom indeed has even this Hindu master of controversy given us so vivid an indictment of western corruption as in his recent article in the *Atlantic*. We hear about modern "classes for teaching the art of profitable mystification", about "psychological tricks to help the sale of commodities in spite of the buyers", about those fields in which the West—with all its pride in being rational—has rivalled what is worst in the East in "creating dark shelters for religious charlatanism." Not the least effective part of the article is that section at the end in which Tagore acknowledges that there is a deep current of spiritual idealism which underlies this surface character of the American mind, and that its sensational news-mongers must not be taken as representative of the whole country. He recalls how, at seventeen years of age, he himself wrote something about a nation not his own, of which he had reason afterwards to be ashamed. "I tried to exhibit the cunning of my pen by polishing my sentences into a keenness that could mock and mutilate truth, but not reflect it." Western editors and reporters must be consoled to learn that their critic wrote in boyhood something not much worse than they write in their maturity. It was in his dispute with Sadler that Macaulay made a retort very like this. Sadler, it seems, had quoted from Macaulay's earlier writings some work that was very much open to attack. Here is the rejoinder:

He has ransacked some collection of college verses, in the hope of finding, among the performances of his supposed antagonist, something as bad as his own. And we must in fairness admit that he has succeeded pretty well. We must admit that the gentleman in question sometimes put into his exercises, at seventeen, almost as great nonsense as Mr. Sadler is in the habit of putting into his books at sixty.

Yet Tagore will not leave the West without a word of encouragement. He does definitely believe that the United States is not destitute of individuals who truly represent the unnumbered generations of the future, men resolved to cherish "the eternal value of the spirit." But he cannot help adding that these are at present few. Like Mr. H. G. Wells, he seems to think of "the profoundly serious minority in the mass of the generally indifferent human species"—at least so far as this part of the West is concerned. How, exactly, the newspapers mis-stated that "fugitive whisper"

of his, we are not told in his article, except for a hint that he expressed his disinclination to make another visit to the United States. But is it not a notable thing that this objectionable country, whose editors refused to publish those significant letters of his, has given in perhaps its foremost literary magazine the place of honour to so sharp a critique upon American life? Is not this rather typical? Nowhere else, one remembers, is such publicity given as is given in Boston or New York to statements like that of Mr. Bernard Shaw—that he cannot understand any man living in the United States “when there is a free country only six days’ sail away.” Our neighbours, whatever else they may lack, are not without the saving grace of humour.

THE melancholy figure of Nicholas II of Russia will be sketched by not a few coming historians. In *The Quarterly Review* Dr. Hagberg Wright points out that material for this purpose is now accumulating fast. Biographers of Nicholas will have far more data than was at the disposal of those, for example, who drew the corresponding portrait of Louis XVI of France. Some ten or twelve memoirs by survivors of the French Revolution contained but scanty and ill-attested facts about the hapless king. But the present Government of Russia has already made accessible to the student such archives as are seldom available until long after the events they record have faded into a dim past. The *Quarterly* article takes account of these, and of a volume of personal reminiscence by Sir J. Hanbury-Williams, entitled “The Emperor Nicholas II as I knew him.” Perhaps a still more illuminating study, to which Dr. Wright has not referred, is that by Sir George Buchanan, who was British Ambassador at Petrograd in those decisive years, and who has given us two fascinating volumes,—*My Mission to Russia*.

Information on this subject from archives which the Soviet authority has in charge must indeed be taken with even more than the proverbial “grain of salt.” Dr. Wright, for example, calls our attention to the contemptuous wording of the title, *Correspondence of Nicholas and Alexandra Romanov*, under which the letters exchanged by the late Tsar and the late Tsaritzza are reproduced. One recalls how on the death of Madame Fouquier-Tinville there was found among her documents a necktie, wrapped in tissue paper, bearing the inscription “Worn by my husband on the day when he procured the condemnation of the widow Capet.” It

would have been too much to expect that the Moscow editors could refrain from like vulgar insult to the dead. But what is significant in these newly published letters is the revelation they give of a character of singular simplicity in a Tsar who was called to a task far beyond his mental fitness to fulfil, and of a domestic life very different indeed from those habits of heartless cunning which Bolshevist propaganda would impute to every royal household.

Why and how did Nicholas II so alienate the affections of a people that had remained loyal to Tsars far worse than himself? Dr. Wright reminds us that he succeeded to the throne unexpectedly, on the death after a brief illness of Alexander III, and that in the self-diffidence of youth he naturally accepted the autocratic ways of his predecessor as a pattern he was bound to follow. Everyone, wrote the Tsaritzza at the time, was making use of his inexperience, and no one was serving him except with an eye to personal profit. A consequence of such diverse counsels was his fitful alternation between reforms half-heartedly conceded and a return to the old sternness when it was too late to be effective and could only inflame. Throughout the letters, too, is to be observed a recurring mood of fatalism, a feeling that it is idle to strive against what must be, and that the things actually happening are such as God has appointed for Russia, no matter what the titular Tsar may do or may omit. One notices the serene detachment with which even vast alterations of policy are made,—a sort of mercurial indifference, in which the grant of a constitution seems to be viewed as just a detail like the good luck or bad luck of a hunting trip. Sir George Buchanan's story of his own efforts, made again and again, to convince Nicholas II of the gravity of what was impending, and of the need to make concessions in time, might be taken as an apt comment on Dr. Wright's view of his character.

Yet he did make concessions,—made them with a childish confidence that all would now be well. He managed, as an old aphorist puts it, to hit the exact point at which he could neither refuse with safety nor concede with grace. When historic passions failed to yield at once to such remedial treatment, there was naturally a fierce recoil to the old ways of repression, and in consequence he was quite unfairly suspected of having been insincere even in his apparently best purposes. Like all who cherish unreasonable hopes, he was thus doomed to unreasonable disappointment. And at the very centre of things was always the influence of the Tsaritzza, who strangely enough did not remember to include herself when she wrote so glibly about the numerous counsellors trading upon her husband's inexperience.

What a tragic picture is in those pieces of advice she gave him!

Be a Peter the Great, a John the Terrible, an Emperor Paul.
Destroy them all. Do not laugh; I so passionately desire to see
you such a man towards those who attempt to direct you . .
Be a ruler.

The poor irresolute Nicholas, badgered like this, and with the very best intentions of a loving but infatuated wife! In a situation that might well have baffled a Julius Caesar, an Oliver Cromwell, a Frederick II,—with the *damnosa hereditas* of centuries of ancestral misrule! And the one thing it was impossible for him to do was to follow such counsel. The net result was to keep the wretched man vacillating backwards and forwards, insistent where it should have been obvious that he must yield, yielding where the sole remaining chance was in insistence. In Stolypin he had a minister effective and resolute. In the Liberal leaders of the Duma he has advisers of flexible and dexterous skill at a compromise. But under his evil genius at his domestic hearth he turned away from both types of help. At the crucial hour his reliance was on Protopopoff, who had been nominated by the Empress Alexandra, and the Empress in turn was under the sway of the unspeakable Rasputin!

It is a sad record. One may well guess that in 1917 Russia could not have been preserved from Revolution even by a Peter the Great, a John the Terrible, or an Emperor Paul. Conjuring with watchwords and policies that suited a time long gone by is of pathetic silliness when the new time is so completely different. But Dr. Wright has at least drawn a pleasing picture of the home of one who has been well compared to some central figure in a Greek tragedy—the plaything of his remorseless fate. According to their lights, which were unfortunately of the dimmest, the Tsar and the Tsaritzza were lovers of their country. In the depths of their hearts was the conviction that Russia was to be saved by an autocratic rule which God Himself had ordained, that it was theirs to hand down to the next generation this divine heritage unstained and unimpaired. Of the realities of Russian life, of the surge and swell of the period in which their lot was cast, they lived unconscious. With no imaginative insight into the Russia of Tolstoy and Gorki and Dostoieffsky, seeing only the Russia of a Court entourage and selfish advisers and infamously cunning monks, they were carried to their doom. But who will cast at their memory the first stone? Against the lurid background of the régime which came after, one can see in Nicholas and Alexandra

perhaps even heroic figures. They meant well. No small praise, in surroundings where so many meant ill!

ONE of our most valuable magazine writers is Mr. Sisley Huddleston. His prolonged and careful study of French internal politics has qualified him as a guide to his own countrymen in a field they have much need and little aptitude to survey. As Paris correspondent of the *London Times*, he made good use of his opportunities. And he always discerns what the English reader is most likely to require help in understanding.

In the current issue of *The Contemporary Review*, Mr. Huddleston has published an account of the economic condition of France as he sees this at present. There has been an economic Revolution. A country long regarded as agricultural has now less than fifty per cent of its people employed on the land. Side by side with this decline of agriculture, has come a growth of industry. Before the Great War, it was in the main the northern Departments that were industrial, and it was just those Departments that were devastated by the German invader. Most of the existing factories were destroyed. But out of the destruction has come a great improvement. The French Government had pledged itself to make good the damage,—rashly, perhaps, from the financial point of view, yet in the end to immense national advantage. Old-fashioned and obsolete machinery had been wrecked, and in its place the most effective of modern equipment was installed. Mr. Huddleston reflects wistfully how a like “disaster” in the British coalfields might have had a like gratifying issue.

A further consequence was industrial decentralization. Factories were set up all over the country,—often in the first instance for the manufacture of munitions, but capable with little change of being turned into factories for use in peace-time. It is needless to say that all this was not only expensive, but also marked by the inevitable inroads of profiteering. The manufacturers who suffered loss in the German invasion estimated their damage on a grandiose scale which it was not easy to check. There was scandalous gossip, too, about official encouragement to such graft, by officials who had arranged to share the spoil. French newspapers began to recall the Panama affair, of which the nauseous memory has not yet been lost, and which always serves as a “point of departure” for criticism upon the present. But, on the whole, Mr. Huddleston sees in France to-day a finer industrial promise than ever existed

before, and a real prospect that she may soon have a leading place among the producing centres of the world.

There is in this article an instructive review of a wide industrial field. Coal, shipping, electric power, are considered in turn. The critic believes that, with care, the importations of coal from England and Germany into France can within the next few years be reduced from the present figure of twenty million tons annually to not more than twelve million tons, with a consequent saving of at least a milliard francs a year. He thinks that within a decade the country—with its great coast line on the Atlantic and on the Mediterranean—may have an almost unique shipping situation. Moreover, the unemployment of 1921 had been exchanged for a severe labour shortage within four years, despite immigration which in France—alone perhaps among European countries—has exceeded emigration. Above all, one notices a transformed habit of mind. In that traditionally conservative land, where old ways have yielded but slowly in the past to new methods, there is now an amazing hospitality to the novel idea. Men are looking out upon more spacious horizons. "French trade is no longer exclusively a family affair. There is no longer a refusal to expand. Groups join themselves to groups. Lackadaisical complaisant systems have been superseded."

Excellent! It is perhaps ungenerous to harbour such a thought,—but it occurs to me to ask whether this most prosperous country will see its way to a little acceleration in repayment of its debt to Great Britain. In England, unfortunately, there has not yet been a disappearance of unemployment, or a reasonable ground to suggest that emigration is being overdone.

CARLYLE once remarked that it is no good symptom either of nations or of individuals to be given much to vaticination. If that be true, we have innumerable tokens of evil in current literature just now, and Mr. J. B. Priestley has a word of opportune warning to speak. I turn to this writer with considerable expectations, for his recent book on George Meredith has placed him among the very best of the literary critics of our time.

His article in *Harper's* is on one point, but that one is most suggestive, and it is illustrated with remarkable power. Mr. Priestley has been tried beyond further endurance by those who think to read the future from the tendencies of the present, forgetting how it is just as likely that there will be reaction from the present drift of things as that this will continue indefinitely. The

“pendulum movement”, of which too much has in the past been made, is in danger of being overlooked altogether by the soothsayers of our time. Perhaps we are captured just now by a passion for mechanical contrivances; but does this prove that some day mechanism will rule everywhere? The fact that our teeth decay faster than the teeth of our ancestors does not indicate that our great-grandchildren will have no teeth at all. Artificial products in food may have reached an unprecedented development, and yet it does not follow that at an early date our meals will consist exclusively of chemical tabloids. The fashions in women’s dress are just as likely to be transformed as to be intensified in the next few years.

So we should cultivate a cautious spirit in the prediction of “what is coming.” Mr. Priestley recalls how the literature of the past contained wildly mistaken conjectures about the future which was then “in sight”, and he pays his tribute of thanks to W. H. Hudson who in *A Crystal Age* set the pattern of far safer guessing than the Wells or Kipling books have given us. Hudson’s imaginative fancy of the dim beyond was at least something quite different from mere exaggeration of the life we know:

Probably, too, most of our splendid discoveries, on which we believe the whole future will be based, will come to be regarded as antiquated jests in seventy years’ time.

There, surely, the critic has fallen into another form of that very vice which he has branded. If the sanguine enthusiast for the science of our time has no ground to be confident of its continued advance, the doubter is at least equally rash in declaring its collapse to be probable. But Mr. Priestley has drawn attention to the most facile of contemporary errors, and the correlative error may wait to be branded by someone else when it has become facile in turn. His thesis might well be extended in another article, to show how the inevitable—even if we could identify it—is not always to be accepted with resignation. Its ultimate benefits may depend in no small degree upon the prolonged resistance with which it meets. Mr. Chesterton put this well when he said that the real free-thinker must be free from the yoke of the future as much as from the yoke of the past.

H. L. S.