

## TOPICS OF THE DAY

"UPLIFTERS": THE MOTOR AGE: A BACKWARD CURVE: BYRON:  
FRANCE AND GERMANY: FASCIST FREEDOM.

NO word in the English language has had worse usage than "Reform", with a capital R. Few words are now as obnoxious to the ordinary person. This, no doubt, is because of the way in which it has been wrested from its proper meaning, and "put to all ignominious use." Political "Reformers" are as much in contempt with us as was the "Patriots" party of his day with Dr. Johnson, whom he provoked into defining patriotism, in his famous dictionary, as "the last refuge of a scoundrel." Etymologically, reform signifies reconstruction, return rather than "advance," restoration instead of radical change, pruning and not uprooting. Reform, a generation ago, came to be regarded as synonymous with progress, and progress as identical with change. By the confusion of these words most of the queer things with which we have become so painfully acquainted in recent legislation were brought to pass. It is a promising sign of the times that professional advocates of "Reform" have at last been clearly recognized, and properly classified. They are now known as "Uplifters." They could not be more appropriately named.

An "Uplifter" is a person with a surplus of "push" and persistence, a maximum of self-conceit and a minimum of comprehension. Fundamentarily, he is a "crank," and, as such, much more likely to be wrong than to be right. Under the once sacrosanct name of "Reformer", an Uplifter had to be treated with reverence, and his propositions heard with becoming awe. Now that he is stripped of his verbal disguise and appears in his real form, there is some hope of ultimately getting rid of him or, at least, of relegating him to his right position as a propounder of theories not more than one in a thousand of which is likely to contain even the germ of a valuable idea.

The United States is the native land and special habitat of the Uplifter. Legislation is his chosen instrument; intimidation, his means of operation. He overflows easily into Canada where his blood relatives are numerous. He invariably begins by seeing

something he regards as *sin*. To repress *sin*, he considers the chief end of legislation. He raises an outcry. Birds of his feather, male and female, flock around him and cackle with him. They magnify a molehill of evil until it becomes a mountain of public iniquity. They "organize". They search the Scriptures, for in them they not only think but *know* they have enduring life for their particular fad, if only they can find a text referring to some totally different thing, in wholly different circumstances, which can be twisted to their justification or the apparent condemnation of what they condemn. This naturally brings in "the Church"—the Church, in these cases, being composed of isolated preachers, who meet in annual convention, and are always ready to pass "resolutions" in favour of anything which somebody with an organization at his back, or in a "holy" tone, intimates it might be well for them that they should pass. Then the politicians begin to take notice and shiver. Shivering is the politician's most noticeable characteristic. He is ever ready to "trust the people"—with his lips—but equally ready to fear—in his heart—two or three of them, whenever or wherever they are gathered together in the name of some fancy of their own. The reduction of ordinary politicians to a mess of moral jelly proves conclusively to "the masses" that the "movement" is "popular" and is on the verge of becoming "irresistible."

When the particular Legislature to be subdued assembles, the Uplifters descend upon it bodily; and the people, willy nilly, are summarily "uplifted" another step towards statutory perfection. Personal liberty and common sense are alike disregarded in the "uplifting" process. No such insignificant things as personal wishes or age-old social practices can be permitted to interrupt what is called "the march of progress" by professional Uplifters, mostly with only parochial knowledge and experience for their guidance, but with an invincible determination to foist their crude notions on the community at large, by means of "law." Ancestor-worship, they hold, is for "the heathen Chinese," not the enlightened Uplifter. It is a joy to them to trample on all past experience, and hold up to scorn opinions founded on immemorial knowledge.

The Uplifter was only getting a start in Charles Dickens's day, but it was a vigorous and prophetic start. It took him two generations, and a trip across the Atlantic, to come fully into his own. "It is an extraordinary thing," writes Dickens in *Edwin Drood*, "that these Philanthropists—our Uplifters—are always denouncing somebody, and that they are always so violently *flush* in *miscreants*." "And it is another most extraordinary thing that they are so given to seizing their fellow-creatures by the scruff of

the neck and bumping them into the path of peace." Dickens denied, however, the correctness of the alleged charge against the Philanthropist that he called out to the unregenerate, "Curse your souls and bodies, come here and be blessed." It was left to our law for him to *act* these words through intimidated Legislatures and by his general overbearing attitude, instead of speaking them. The question now is, how much longer must we endure the Upholder's methods, and his utterly unpractical or impossible notions, which he has got embodied so freely in our statute books?

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**SUMMER**, "the exquisite time," is with us again. It has but one drawback in our northern latitude—its brevity; but only in the north can its joys be rightly tasted. It is well worth living in the north for the contrasts of the seasons alone. Where an eternal summer reigns, there also reigns perpetual monotony and ennui. One can enjoy the pleasures and beauties of our winter, guard against its severities, and look hopefully to more clement days. One can do nought but endure the oppression of unceasing heat. The thought of summer raises the question if we are not in imminent danger of losing its richest and most enriching delights through our present wild, not to say savage, habits of locomotion, and of life modelled on them. Is not beauty—in its widest and best sense—the supreme joy of the world? Is it not whatsoever thing is true, whatsoever thing is honest, whatsoever thing is just, whatsoever thing is pure, whatsoever thing is lovely, whatsoever thing is of good report? Beauty is subjective rather than objective. It is mental rather than physical. Richard Jefferies, one of the most ardent of modern Nature-worshippers, and one of the keenest of philosophers, did not believe that the beauties of woods and fields and air have much if any existence outside the mind of man, which he thought supreme. To the blind there are no beauties of light and shade, of colour or form. To the deaf there are no beauties of sound. To our forefathers, rugged mountain scenery with which we associate thrilling emotions of grandeur and mystery conveyed only suggestions of horror and repulsion. Moving pictures, painted by the glowing brush of the setting sun on a canvas of evening cloud sustained by the infinite blue, primitive men scanned with terrified eyes as possible portents of divine wrath.

What we call the sense of beauty, our sixth and greatest sense, has been produced within us only by a long process of evolution. The beauty that we see or hear or feel or taste or touch is in ourselves, not in the things with which we associate it. The joys

derivable from a rightly developed and cultivated sense of beauty are the supreme and only worthy delights of human existence. What attempts are we making to grasp them? What efforts are we putting forth to avoid their loss by permitting them, in greater part, to escape us?

Of all the Ages through which men have passed surely the "Motor Age" is one of the most retrogressive and saddest. Through all the other Ages there was constant mental and moral as well as material progress. There was ever a God above man, and a God-given soul within him. To-day we have apparently said to the Motor, "Be thou our God," and to Petrol, "Dwell in us as our Spirit." We have summoned Jazz to regulate our homes and direct the thoughts and actions of our children. We commune with Nature by "automobile," and read her soul through a wind-shield. Her myriad harmonies tickle our ears—if they can—through the lash of a 25-mile gale in our faces, and the monotonous rattle of labouring machinery. Whether at home, with our jazz, or abroad with our clanking, honking, foolishly-speeding cars, we think of nothing but mad rushing about and silly social entertainment. "Pleasure" has become the main—almost the only—pursuit of our lives. Anything higher, anything holier, anything more worth while, we regard as passé, as old-fashioned and more or less ridiculous.

Let one look about, enquire and see if these are false charges. Canada is a young country with much ugliness of many kinds, both physical and moral, to be cast out, and many natural beauties of mind and graces of life to be developed and cultivated. Are we getting her off with a good start? Let us pause and ponder. Her summer is her crowning beauty, fitted to move and exalt the dullest soul. What is the significance or worth of that or any other beauty apart from humanity? Can one not see that its right use lies exclusively in the soul of her people, and that apart from them it has no purpose and no real existence? Everything for Canadians depends on the loveliness that can be let into their national and individual lives from the storehouses of their own minds and hearts.

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IT IS not merely of the quiet walk, the delightful ramble or the pleasant drive amid scenes of natural beauty that the Motor Age has largely deprived us, but of the not less precious beauties of thought and feeling to be found in well-chosen and well-read books. Canadians, and especially Nova Scotians, once prided themselves on their intellectuality and their literary tastes. Have

What present cause for such boasting? Is it not true that they have almost ceased to be readers, and, in like degree, to be thinkers? Glancing over newspaper head-lines and exciting news items is not reading. Neither is dipping into magazines or wallowing in sensational novels, often products of semi-illiterate writers whose ideas are as crude as their language. Time was, and not so long ago, when there were reading or literary and scientific clubs in almost every town and village, doing excellent cultural work at least during the long winter months, and accumulating fresh stores of enthusiasm in summer. Where are they now? In addition to them, every home of refinement was a reading centre and a contributor to popular education. The book-shops were stocked with the best works of the best authors, respectably bound in a manner to foster respect for their contents. The bookseller prided himself on having a fund of information concerning new publications of merit, and always stood gladly willing to order what he recommended or his customers desired, if he did not keep it on his shelves. One has only to glance at the windows of a modern book-shop, in passing, to appreciate the unfortunate change which has taken place. A look inside shows little but "school books" and massed, paper-covered novels, mostly nasty, but never cheap in price. Candy, cigarettes and magazines are usually lumped together in trade. The shopman knows no more concerning his "goods" than the average produce-dealer about his eggs.

But what does it matter, since there is no time for either reading or thinking, and very few homes in which to read or think? The head of the present day household is to be found at business, on the golf links, at his club, or "joy-riding" with or without his wife or family. The wife—and not infrequently her mother—are too intent on fashion-plates for more serious reading, or too much taken up with "bridge" or mah-jongg for more important things. The children, if old enough, are "jazzing" to jazz brayings, without the thought of such a trivial thing as the improvement of their minds, or they are "moveying" at the Movies. The younger children are at school, where a popular fiction has it that they are being "educated" by mostly pitifully under-educated young women employed as their teachers. The main aim of their supposed educators appears to be to stuff them with usually quite unpractical facts, and inspire them with a lasting antipathy to books in general and all useful books in particular.

What beauty is there—what beauty could there be, in such social conditions? What opportunity for culture or self-development do they present? Rational conversation has always

been taboo in "society." It is now prohibited much more effectively than are or can be intoxicants, wherever and whenever men or women or men and women do congregate. One must be frivolous to the verge or over the verge of gross buffoonery and indecency, first, last and all the time, or stand self-pilloried as out-of-date. Most of the clergy, not a few of the lawyers, and some of the doctors used to be scholarly and broadly interested. They have, apparently, with excellent exceptions, fallen to the general level. The word "apparently" is used advisedly, for even if one is a sound reader and thinker at present, one has in self-defence to conceal the fact. The clergy who now publicly profess to be readers seem to fare chiefly on Karl Marxism or similar mental pabulum, which they retail to their congregations with a flavouring of distorted Christianity, when they are not—as they fancy—more profitably employed in extracting vital, spiritual lessons from the vagaries of the heroine of the latest "best seller," for the edification and growth in grace of their hearers. Most lawyers no longer read even the literature of their own profession, much of which was and is so well worth reading. They have elected to be mechanical gropers among the cinders of "decided cases". The doctors, let us be thankful, have at least remained sober-minded and true to their profession which this generation of them has exalted beyond measure; and, in elevating it, they have proportionately raised themselves. In and through them shines what is perhaps our brightest ray of hope.

These presents are not intended as a wail either of gloom or of doom, but a plain statement of patent facts, for the purpose of making those who read it look around, consider, and ask themselves if they are contributing actively or passively to the unwholesome social conditions in which we are living. The present, as remarked before in these *Topics*, is merely a "backward curve" in the great stream of human progress. Evolution, divinely directed, is ever at the task of creating and upbuilding. As well written by a great poet-seer:

Far beyond her myriad coming ages earth will be  
Something other than the wildest modern guess of you or me.

It is for us who are of the day to exert ourselves for the casting aside of the social obstructions that are causing the temporary retrograde flow of the stream of progress, so that ere long we may hope to pass out of this noisy, stupid, Motor-ridden, Petrol-bechoked, Jazz-deafened Age into a larger, brighter and better era in which the Spirit of Beauty will be re-enthroned.



The centenary of Byron's death has evoked much public comment on the man and his works. As was to have been expected, the man has come in for the lion's share of attention. This age, not unlike many a past age, is more interested in personal gossip than in poetry. It seems hard that, a hundred years after his death, this particular man should be pursued by persistent denigrators, chiefly for having been less hypocritical than most of those of his day and generation. The truth is that there has never been an uglier moral era in British social life than that in which Byron grew to young manhood, and won special notoriety, not because he was worse than his social equals and contemporaries, but because he did not trouble himself to conceal his vices or seek credit for virtues which he did not claim to possess. It was his want of conventional pretence, rather than his more gross offences, that won reprobation. The world into which he was born was still suffering from the consequences of the French Revolution. Scepticism was fashionable. Blighted political hopes and lost faith had induced a spirit of general, sneering cynicism. The rage of the French capital had sown immorality far and wide. The Napoleonic wars had produced as abundant a crop of profiteers as have the wars of our own day. And the profiteers were not of the *profession vulgus*, but recognized social leaders who traded on their offices or their friends in high office. Extravagance and corruption of every sort were rampant, more especially sexual corruption.

Byron, then a youth of strong passions, floated blithely on the turbid social stream. From all the evidence with regard to his contemporaries, there is little to indicate that he was a greater sinner than they. He was simply more open. He not only permitted himself to be "found out," but openly exhibited his dissidences from the nominal strait paths of what was still, at heart, Puritan England. Others cloaked their misdeeds before the public. Not he. He was too haughty, too recklessly young and wild-hearted. Apart from his coarse indulgences there is no stain on his name. One dark charge, after his separation from a wife of wholly incompatible tastes and temperament, was whispered about in his day, and has been openly promulgated since then. It has had recent, centenary recrudescence. It is still, as from the first, based mainly on suspicion and conjecture. No evidence has been adduced in support of it, on which one could be convicted in a court of law of even a serious misdemeanour.

If Byron lived flamingly, according to our standards, he died heroically, in a worthy cause. And he wrote greatly, if carelessly,

and without due reverence for his chosen art. There is nothing immoral, and scarcely anything gravely irregular in his writings, from the modern point of view. His *Don Juan*, long rigorously excluded from all strictly proper libraries, is, if not clean, certainly not indecent, as compared with many present-day "best sellers," or as compared with certain of Swinburne's earlier lyrics, now no longer censured, and with lapses of the older writers, even some of the gravest of them. That he had not only great poetic genius but great genius of many kinds is indisputable. He wrote in the same slap-dash manner that he lived, taking as little thought for his literary fame as for his personal name. But so did Burns, and who, to-day, thinks of recalling the great Scottish poet's irregular private ways when his poetry is being appraised or appreciated? What have the public to do with the personal character or habits of a great artist in poetry, any more than with those of an artist in music, sculpture or painting? Shakespeare was no saint.

Byron, like Burns, wrote much that was inferior and unworthy of him, but with it he—again like Burns—wrote not a little that is real poetry of a very high, if not quite the highest type, and will live and give pleasure to generations yet to come in spite of literary blemishes which he did not take the pains to rectify, as he could so easily have done. Byron's poems won boundless acclamation in their day. Those acclamations cannot but have distant reverberations. What appealed so strongly to one age is sure to touch others. There is not a little in Byron's poetry that is universally stirring.

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THOSE who persist in believing that France has been playing a selfish or reckless part in the Ruhr are forgetting her situation, and the revelations of the Great War. Had there been no impertinent obtrusion of the Fourteen Points, no untimely Armistice, and no indecisive and premature stopping of the war, there would have been no need for France's action. The war was within less than a fortnight of terminating in the complete and unmistakable defeat of Germany and the triumph of the Allies, when President Wilson intervened, and spoiled all. The German armies with their equipment were closely packed within the long, narrow, military corridor of Belgium. They were being thrust back, virtually in rout, from the west, before on-rushing British forces. In the east, great French and American armies were sweeping forward, without effective check or opposition, to cut off the German retreat to the Rhine. With scarcely any additional effort, and little further loss, the whole German force could have been penned in Belgium



and compelled to surrender at discretion, without being able to strike another effective blow. Germany's pride and self-confidence would have been irremediably broken. Terms to emphasize the Allied victory and secure the proper fruits of it could have been dictated at will, and peace for a long period ensured. The manner in which the final making of a settlement was gone about and carried through, after long, unnecessary delay, completed the confusion inaugurated by the Armistice. The Germans were permitted to retire with the honours of war, to boast and believe that they had never been defeated, and to nourish plans of revenge against France. Their own country was left intact and without foreign indebtedness. France, weighted down by the burdens of the war and weakened by the loss of men and means, was provided with no security for the future, and with only illusory promises of reparation for the damage actually inflicted on her industrial centres.

To fancy that Germany is necessarily impotent because of her nominal disarmament is to ignore the teaching of the later developments of the Great War, and of the progress of potential military invention since the war. Rifles may henceforth be obsolete as weapons of offence. Heavy artillery and great armies may never again be seen on the field of battle. Naval fleets as well as armies may be superseded. But war of a far more sudden, deadly and responsive character than in the past may be, and probably is, well within the bounds of possibility. Therefore the nation known to cherish thoughts and intentions of waging such war needs much closer watching and much stricter boundaries than ever before. Hence the turning of French attention to air defences, and the desire for a defensible line of partition between France and Germany—a line to which France is both historically and naturally entitled, and to which she won additional right by her victory in an unprovoked war of aggression upon her.

As to the menace of the future, it has only to be remembered that the old tradition of the potency of numerical superiority in troops was vanishing in the later stages of the Great War. By 1918, the number of men in the French infantry had been reduced one-third. At the Armistice the Allied air-forces are now known to have been on the eve of a transformation which would have made Berlin a part of the battle front. In that year the American chemical service was beginning the extensive manufacture of Lewisite—a gas so deadly that, by official estimate, fifty aeroplanes, each carrying two tons of it, could effectively poison the whole population of a city as large as New York. That gas would have been brought into active service in a few more weeks. Gasses still

more destructive may have been compounded in the secret laboratories of Germany since then. Two or three different "rays", of varying potency and applicability to different military purposes, have been discovered. In Great Britain there is what is called the "death ray," which its inventor, Grindell-Matthews, believes to be "the most terrible weapon of war ever perfected." He claims that its death-dealing beam will wither everything in its path. And his claim is evidently taken seriously by the British Admiralty to which he is under pledge concerning it. Other amazing developments in this direction are apparently at hand, and will certainly be seized and applied by Germany. It follows that the next war, which is more than likely to be a war of revenge by Germany against France, may be plotted almost in secret and carried out at a stroke by a comparatively small military force. Attack may be the only defence against it. A sudden rush on either side may be decisive, almost in hours, instead of months or years as in the past. Position will be all-important. The sympathy of the world should therefore be with France in her strivings for a strategic boundary between herself and Germany, a boundary by which she will not be almost fatally handicapped instead of helped, as she was when Germany sprang at her throat, across a neutral line, in 1914.

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**P**REMIER Mussolini of Italy is a great "democrat"—in his mind—as becomes one who began life as an ardent, modern Socialist. Lenin also was a democrat. He, like Mussolini, was in favour of letting the people rule, but he regarded himself as "the people." So, apparently, does the Italian dictator. There is not even a thin partition between Socialism and despotism. It is the very basic principle of Socialism, and still more of Communism, that democracy must obey, both politically and industrially. Whom it must obey, is never specified. One thing is always obvious, that it is to be allowed no choice in the matter, any more than it is to have individual freedom of any other kind. Both Lenin and Mussolini have given practical demonstrations of this—the one as an open, murderous despot, the other as a ruthless dictator. Both have claimed to be "liberators." It is admitted that Mussolini has restored order in Italy. That is to his credit. But his proclaimed reverence for democracy is a cruel jest as emphasized by his public claim that five million Italians *voluntarily* voted for him in the recent elections, and that it is "an insult to them to suggest that they were in any way intimidated." "An Englishman in Italy" tells the *Manchester Guardian* a very different story. In

proof of his contention that the elections were the reverse of "free," he quotes a set of instructions issued from Fascist headquarters as to the polling. Agents were told that it was "of the utmost importance to obtain complete mastery of the polling stations from the very start." They were directed to "keep away scrutineers who cannot be depended on, and the representatives of Opposition lists". They were to arrange with "magistrates, for the most part faithful and to be relied on," as to the methods necessary for the voting. "In the case of those few presidents of polling-sections who might oppose Fascism," it was left to the tact and energy of the Fascist representatives to prevent them from ruining "our plebiscital vote." They were told that "It is undesirable to use the actual polling-booths," because "Open voting prevents our adversaries from voting against us." Here is further direction:

Where the presidents, from hostility or too great zeal in their office, insist on the use of the polling-booths, arrange that uncertain voters or suspects are traced by a control sign. Such a control sign can be arranged by giving each elector one, two, or three preferential votes which the elector will vote for, writing on the paper the name and corresponding number. For this reason and in order to use it as an identification mark we invite all Fascisti to abstain from preference votes.

The success of these striking electioneering methods, the *Guardian* correspondent thinks, may be gauged by the fact that in his own native town, Amendola, a leading Oppositionist, instead of getting an enormous majority as in the last election, got only 27 votes, "less than the number of voters in his own family." All the Opposition groups are said to be producing evidence that in country places thousands of people were prevented from voting, were expelled or imprisoned for the time being, and intimidated or misled in various ways. Furthermore, it is alleged that "punitive expeditions" were organized after the elections against such as had ventured to vote openly against the Government, in which severe bodily punishment, resulting sometimes in death, was inflicted. The truth of the serious state of violence in the country is said to be demonstrated by the Pope's encyclical, by his gift of half a million lire to help in repairing the damages, and by his telegram to the Society of Catholic Youth of Italy, in which he expresses "a fervent hope that these acts of violence will soon cease, for they are certainly not calculated to add to the prestige of a civilized people." So, on the whole, it seems not improbable that the tender mercies for democracy of a Socialist, even when converted to Fascism, are, if not cruel, at least not gentle.

W. E. M.