TOPICS OF THE DAY

PASSCHENDAELE: PEACE OR WAR: THE STEVENS ENQUIRY: ROOSEVELT AND THE U. S. A.: THE POWER OF THE CHURCH.

MR. DAVID LLOYD GEORGE, in his prolonged period of retirement from active direction of British political life, has not been devoting himself exclusively to the cultivation of potatoes. It was inevitable that one so sensitive to the popular mood should catch the prevalent literary infection of memoir-writing; and with more justification than some others. Concerning the tremendous events of 1914-18, he can say in a unique sense *quorum pars magna fui.*

There is no evidence that the veteran statesman has come to mellowing year, and we look in vain for the calm serenity of old age in the spirit of his writing. The fever of life is fitful as ever. Like an old warrior, he stirs up memory only to fight his battles over again. As befits the vast range of his subject, he writes in the expansive manner, and, now that he has reached his fourth volume, he is fairly into his stride. It is the same Lloyd George still—vivid, fearless, provocative. His eye is not dim, nor his natural force abated.

Chapter LXIII of this fourth volume, which was published during last autumn, extends to 140 pages and is devoted to what the author calls "The Campaign of the Mud: Passchendaele." The printing *in extenso* of official documents, to which Mr. Lloyd George has special opportunities of access, constitutes not a little of the unique interest we have in these memoirs. And yet, he makes little or no pretence to giving an objective account of that most memorable and terrible battle, or rather, series of battles. On the contrary, he provides us with a sustained and vigorous effort at self-justification, and, as we might suspect in a controversialist of his reputation and character, he develops his theme through a vehement polemic directed against those who, he believes, were profoundly and culpably in the wrong.

The war-time Prime Minister has very definite views on military strategy. He tells us that they are the results of his experience in political warfare, and of his modest acquaintance with military history. Never attack an enemy at his strongest point! But he deserts his accepted rules of warfare when he comes to develop his own battle of the pen. Here we have the frontal attack,

assaulting the enemy where he is most deeply entrenched, and with no thought for the casualties that are left behind on the battlefield. His objective is to destroy for all time the reputation of the late Field-Marshal Earl Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in France and Flanders.

It does not require the facile pen of Mr. Lloyd George to remind many of us that the battles of 1916 and 1917, fought by the British Army on the western front, can find no parallel in military history. The finest blood of the Empire was shed with a mad prodigality, the recollection of which has still power to numb the heart. But our writer goes on to say that this costly strategy was not only a terrible military blunder; even when its mistaken character was evident, it was pursued with a persistent and egoistic obstinacy by the high command of the British Army. His contention is that the plan of fighting the Germans at the apex of the famous Ypres salient was conceived in the mind of Field-Marshal Haig; that the Commander-in-Chief was supported by an obsequious general staff, conspicuously by the late Sir William Robertson: that Haig was entreated persistently, not only by himself as Prime Minister but by high allied generals, to abandon the enterprise: that once undertaken, the operations were fatally hampered by persistent rain-fall, which turned the shell-pocked terrain into a sea of mud, rendering all attainment of the military objectives inconceivable: and yet Earl Haig kept battering at the enemy lines, making paltry, worthless advances, throwing away young life with an insane blindness to its utter stupidity, and in callous disregard for the conservation of the men who had committed their destinies to his keeping.

Mr. Lloyd George makes no charge against the personal integrity of the British Field-Marshal. He believes that the operations were undertaken in the firm belief that they were the only possible strategy, and that Haig displayed a wonderful steadfastness of purpose in holding to them persistently even when they miscarried. But Haig was cursed fatally, if ever man was, by the defects of his virtues. In a word, he was the wrong man in the wrong place. Temperamentally, he was unsuited for the responsibilities of his high command, and to his incompetence must be attributed the terrible carnage of Passchendaele.

These are serious charges, and their gravity is unrelieved by the faint personal praise with which the ex-Prime Minister attempts to damn for all time the Commander-in-Chief. There are too many British homes for which the word "Passchendaele" is the symbol of a proud, brave sorrow, deep as life itself, to leave one

willing that such allegations should not be examined by more impartial minds. Already they have projected a controversy, in which serious question marks have been placed against some of the conclusions reached. There are far more important issues involved than whether Mr. Lloyd George or the late Earl Haig was the more competent strategist. We may be sure that the public mind of this generation will not let the discussion rest without fuller light being shed upon it than is supplied even by copious documentation of the Lloyd George memoirs.

One side of the case has been advanced vehemently and with ill-concealed passion. The arguments are well-supported; so that even the most loyal adherent of the Haig tradition may suspect, without prejudging the major question of whether the battle should ever have been fought, that the actual tactical movements were not carried out with the wisest consideration for the value of human life. But the case has been presented in singularly bad taste. Even if the writer was so completely and inevitably right when so many were persistently and demonstrably wrong, it will be unfortunate if it is discussed in terms of the justification even of so exalted a person as the war-time Prime Minister of Britain. He vitiates his arguments at every turn by his strident self-assertion, so that one is led to suspect that the last word has not been spoken on the subject. And when that word is uttered, perhaps we shall be able to restore the laurel wreath to the brow from which it has been snatched away so rudely. After all, Haig did lead the British Army to victory a year later, and over those self-same battle-fields, held in such contempt by Mr. Lloyd George.

IN our problem-haunted world, there is one dominant issue, which continues to propose itself as a clear test of our moral progress. Are we drifting into war, or are we making for peace? All talk of economic recovery or of social reconstruction, in a world menaced by the fear of war, is idle chatter. The implications of modern war are not hidden from any intelligent mind, and the experts confirm us in our anticipation of their character. Even the suggestion that war is possible lays a paralysing grip on that mutual trust and confidence without which the business of the world cannot be carried on. The greatest single step that could be taken towards the relief of our present economic dislocation would be the elimination of the threat of war. Our ice-bound world of business would melt into the promise of new life under the influences of such a springtime.

The pessimistic realists of our time continue to tell us that the issue is already dead. The only question that remains upon our hands is how long and by what means we can postpone the inevitable evil day! And there is much in our current life to justify their forebodings.

The barometer of our international weather is Disarmament. It has fallen lower than ever, and the indicator tends in the direction of "Stormy". Though we allow for probable exaggerations on the part of France, it does seem undoubted that Germany is rearming and that large numbers of the country's young manhood are being exercised in military discipline. With this threat upon her borders, France continues to make large appropriations for complete war-like preparation. Her political leaders have definitely committed themselves to the philosophy *si vis pacem, para bellum*, and beyond that point of view they steadfastly refuse to look. Signor Mussolini has been making unusually bellicose speeches, and has inaugurated a new system of military training for children in Italian schools. We need not wonder that Great Britain, after working with exemplary patience for some measure of disarmament, has yielded at last to a popular clamour for an increase in her Air Forces. Even Mr. Ramsay MacDonald has been moved to make a public defence of her action.

Japan is making no secret of her desire to be free from all entangling commitments. It need occasion no surprise that she has refused to respond to overtures that she should guarantee the territorial integrity of China. Already she has embarked upon a very different policy. The Washington Naval Agreement, the only real step that has been taken towards mutual limitation of armaments since 1918, comes up for revision early next year. Japan will press for the abandonment of the 5:5:3 ratio existing between the naval forces of the United States, Britain and herself. She is making a definite proposal for increase of sea power.

Great Britain is obviously reluctant to abandon the Disarmament cause. The latest proposal is a system of licensing for makers of armaments. It raises a familiar problem for those who propose to deal with social evils by means of legislation—prohibition *versus* licence. Shall we end or mend: forbid or regulate? The complete abolition of armament is an obvious counsel of perfection, far beyond the range of practical attainment. In these circumstances, any influence that will moderate the madness of unlimited military preparation must call for the support of all who are interested in the well-being of the human race.

The outlook for peace is not bright, but there are gleams of hope that are by no means negligible. If international policy is

dominated by fear, it is obvious that the deepest fear is a wholesome terror of war itself. European life has been shocked by no fewer than three terrible assassinations within three months—involving the tragic deaths of a King, a Chancellor and a Foreign Minister—three first class *casus belli*. We have survived that. It has been manifest, throughout the inevitable tensions created by these international incidents, that the last result desired by any nation was recourse to war. There has been a studied avoidance of the suggestion. The world of 1934 is not the world of 1914. The year closed with the heartening news that France and Germany have reached an agreement over the prospective results of the Saar plebiscite. It is obvious that nobody wants war—surely not an irrelevant circumstance in the pursuit of peace.

When we endeavour to estimate the progress of any great moral ideal, there is an inevitable ebb and flow in the movement towards its attainment. And yet, there may be a deep-set stream of tendency, less observable but more certain in its direction than the superficial swirls and eddies. The gathering momentum of such a flood is making itself evident in the minds of many intelligent people. There is a growing resentment against the nefarious traffic in arms, a trade without *patria* and without conscience. The period of sentimentalism in the movement towards peace has passed, and now the peoples of the world are being confronted with clear-cut moral decisions. We have to accept international co-operation or chaos. The League of Nations is becoming the rallying point of all men of goodwill, and of those who have any pretensions to moral sanity. The cause is not yet lost. Our task is to make vocal in the counsels of the nations the conscience of those who refuse to consent to the unimaginable barbarity of a new world-war.

THE HON. H. H. STEVENS, lately Minister of Trade in the Dominion Cabinet, holds the centre of the stage in the contemporary political scene. It was on his initiative that the Government was induced to set up a Royal Commission to investigate the question of how far certain major business organisations, some of them household names among us, are using the position of relative monopoly to indulge in practices that are oppressive and unethical. There is a wide-spread suspicion that at least some of these powerful establishments, through buying on a very large scale, are able so to control markets that they have ruthlessly depressed the reasonable rewards of primary producers. At the same time, the

suggestion is made that these concerns have continued to amass profits considerably disproportionate to the original cost of the goods they sell. Further, that by using commercial advantage they have waged a persistent guerilla warfare on other merchants with a view to the complete extermination of the small traders, so that there will be no place for any other than themselves in the earth.

The evidence gathered by the Commission appeared to justify its appointment. "Startling Revelations" filled the columns of our daily press. Morning after morning, our breakfast-table thoughts were disturbed by "price-spreads", "chain-store methods", "mass-buying", the "Stevens Probe", and other similar journalistic laconisms. And, then, suddenly events took a new turn.

In his zeal for the public cause which he had espoused, Mr. Stevens did not, by any means, confine his activities to the committee-room. He addressed meetings on the subject, in which not only did he focus attention on disquieting revelations, but he went on to frame indictments, in which certain well-known names were singled out for conspicuous mention, and not always to the advantage of their commercial reputation. True, these meetings were of a semi-private character, such as gatherings of parliamentary members and clubs. Memoranda were printed and privately circulated. But, in a world such as ours, it is impossible to be at the same time a public figure and a private individual. The inevitable happened, and the accusations passed from semi-privacy into blazing publicity. The whole Dominion was set a-talking.

Meantime, Mr. Bennett was absent in Europe; but, even at that distance, he could not fail to notice such prominent activities on the part of his colleague. On his return to Canada, a brief, polite, but firmly-worded interchange of letters took place between the Ministers, and Mr. Stevens ended the matter by tendering a resignation which was promptly accepted.

It is difficult to see what other action the Prime Minister could have taken. Mr. Stevens was chairman of a Royal Commission, a body which had at least a quasi-judicial character. The record of evidence was not complete, and the Report had not yet been formulated. There was ground for legitimate complaint that the chairman had been guilty of premature judgment in the case. Indeed, he had passed from being judge to becoming prosecutor. And, according to Mr. Bagnet's principles as enunciated in *Bleak House*, whatever may be one's personal opinions, "discipline must be maintained."

Inevitably, the suggestion was made that pressure had been brought to bear upon the Prime Minister to close the mouth of his

offending lieutenant. Mr. Bennett's reply was not only to continue the Commission, with Mr. Stevens retained as a member, but to widen its scope to include any commercial abuse that interested parties might care to bring before its notice.

The Royal Commission is still prosecuting its enquiries. The latest evidence is as disquieting as ever. Witnesses allege that the normal operations of "chain-stores" include traffic with work-shops, whose conditions take us back to the worst memories of sweated labour in England; that the wages of employees are grossly inadequate; that the business methods adopted force responsible managers into systematic cheating of the public through short weight. In one case we are informed that the entire staff of a store was threatened with dismissal for no other reason than to maintain the pressure of the business screw. These allegations are being vigorously denied, and rebutting evidence is being produced. But the public mind is uneasy; with our prolonged economic distress, in some quarters its enragement is ill-concealed.

In the course of the next twelve months, the Dominion of Canada will be summoned to elect a new parliament. The question that is agitating many minds is, what will Mr. Stevens do? And where will he do it? Clearly, he has raised an issue that no party can dare to avoid. The electorate will see to that.

In more leisurely days, when people still read Browning, there were certain lines from *Bishop Blougram's Apology* that were frequently quoted. They were to the effect that "just when we are safest", something turns up. Among the possibilities mentioned were "a fancy from a flower-bell", "some-one's death" and "a chorus ending from Euripides." The turbulent figure of Mr. Stevens does not fit easily into the fanciful or tragic categories of the poet's suggestion, but he has turned up. Doubtless the party programme makers, even now, are preparing to entreat us to cast our suffrages on this side or that. But they must be a little disturbed about Mr. Stevens. And the disturbance is healthy. He has introduced a realistic element into Canadian politics, which party leaders must take into their reckoning.

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT has won a notable personal victory in the mid-term elections to the United States Congress. There is but one possible explanation. It is evident that for the great majority of his fellow-citizens the President is the only leader to whom they are willing to pledge their support. In the devising of cryptograms to express their manifold operations, the New Deal pro-

gramme-makers have almost exhausted the combination possibilities of the English alphabet. Not a few of these have expired prematurely; but at least the President can say, as few other Democratic leaders have been able to affirm, that this policy is still the programme of the U.S.A.

It is difficult to see what other decision the nation could have reached. At a period of grave national crisis, you cannot expect to win an election on the basis of destructive negative criticism. The Republican Party had neither alternative leader nor alternative programme to suggest. Under these circumstances, President Roosevelt has been established in the seat of government, with majorities at his command such as no Democratic President has enjoyed since the formation of the Republican Party. The crucial element in his victory is his triumph in the Senate, where he has obtained the coveted two-thirds majority, so necessary in the United States system of government. Probably a safe comment on the elections would be the suggestion that Mr. Roosevelt's establishment in power will not create very grave disappointment in the Republican party. Responsibility for the present government of the United States of America is not a subject for the indulgence of the sin of envy.

There was one phase of the electioneering struggle that attracted considerable notice beyond the United States. It was concerned with the candidature of the world-famous writer, Mr. Upton Sinclair, who ran for the position of Governor in the State of California. He secured the Democratic nomination, but not on the orthodox party programme, and he did not obtain the official blessing of the President on his campaign. Mr. Sinclair, as we might suspect from the character of his writings, had a programme of a distinctly radical character. Conforming to the current practice of devising slogans, he labelled his policy EPIC (*End Poverty in California*). It was really a bold formulation of a programme of state socialism. He was not elected, but the majority of his opponent was sufficiently small to provoke the reflection that in present-day American politics the real alternative to the presidential policies is not a return to "rugged individualism", but an outlook with its eyes turned considerably to the left.

Our estimate of the success which has attended that vast enterprise of the N.R.A. will depend much upon our point of view. If we compare the present position with the hopeless morass in which the nation was floundering when Mr. Roosevelt took over his office, there can be no doubt that he has inspired great masses of the people with new confidence and hope. That is no mean

achievement. Its surest attestation is the firm vote of confidence which he has just received. During his presidential campaign, he is reported to have challenged the electorate to judge his worth by the enemies he made. He is entitled to reverse the process and to challenge evaluation of his success by the confidence he has awakened. On the other hand, nothing approaching "normalcy" has been reached in the economic life of the nation. It is true that such distressing occurrences as bank failures have almost completely receded from the social horizon, but the number of unemployed is still estimated at 16,500,000. There is still much artificial stimulation in what measure of economic activity is in process. On the occasion of his recent retirement, Dean Inge is reported to have repeated his observation that money was being spent as though we had come into a fortune, instead of having lost one. To a great extent that is the policy of the American President. Under present conditions, probably, there is no alternative. But it cannot go on indefinitely, and at present the best we can wish for the people of the United States is that they may be able to weather another winter without serious social disturbance. At present, they pin a much-tried faith on the personal leadership of the President.

Apart from the considerable interest which the Canadian people must take in the economic welfare of the United States, the Democratic victory has an international significance. Mr. Roosevelt has an absolute majority in the Senate. The lack of such a majority was the fatal rock on which the late President Wilson foundered in his purpose to include his own people in the League of Nations. What will Mr. Roosevelt do with his majority? It is being suggested that possibly the United States may yet enter the League. After all, they never passed judgments upon the League comparable to the opposition of the Union of Soviet Republics. Russia has eaten her words, and now sits at the League table. Mr. Roosevelt has established himself in the confidence of his own people, but he would draw to himself the gratitude and admiration of the whole world if he could lead them into something more than intermittent co-operation for the great ends of international peace at Geneva. Possibly, it would be no mean step towards the realization of his present and immediate concern—the economic recovery of the American nation. However he decides, Canadians will wish him well as he braces himself to his new efforts, for we can extract no satisfaction from the continued impoverishment of our great sister people.

THE eclipse of democracy is driving us back upon the philosophy of the State. If, as Aristotle maintained, the final cause of the political community is the service of the highest good, clearly we cannot divorce ethics from government. An effective social system requires organs through which to act, and if society is supposed to have a moral character, it ought to have a conscience. Somewhere and somehow, in a healthy State, there ought to be a visible and vocal expression of the good life, to inspire, and if need be, to rebuke the public mind. Such, indeed, is the function of that ancient and universal society known as the Church.

In many parts of the world, the Church appears to be moribund with age and tradition. There are modern leaders of thought who declare that the day of the Church is done, some merely suggesting the idea with that polite respect which is due to an institution so venerable, and others trumpeting the news with manifest satisfaction that another old dotard is dead. They have come to a somewhat premature judgment on the matter. If Herr Hitler knew history better, probably he would not be the man he is. It is certain that he would have paused twice, yea thrice, before be burned his fingers over the question of religion. There must have been many spheres open to his dictatorial fervour, more urgent and less complicated than the Christian Church.

The momentous struggle between the German Christians and the protesting Confessional Synod appears to have ended in a victory for the principle of religious liberty. "The Leader" has declared that from henceforth, so far as he is concerned, there will be no interference with the sincere spiritual convictions of the German people, and the *Reichsbishof* has been duly snubbed. The dispute raised questions, not only for the theologian and the ecclesiastic: they penetrated as deep as the nature of Christianity itself. Even such as profess to take no interest in these ghostly concerns, if they are true lovers of liberty, cannot be entirely unmoved by such an issue to the struggle. It may be that the ancient battle for freedom will have to be re-fought on many fronts in the modern world. Any dictator can master a disorganised and disheartened rabble, but history has some illuminating commentaries upon those who menace the fundamental liberties of the human soul, when these erect themselves into the rock-like fortress of an authority that is transcendental and divine. Even for such as have cast away the ancient faith, it must be a noteworthy circumstance that in a world where a century's gains in liberty can disappear overnight, there is one voice left to declare the rights of conscience before God and man.

Professor Einstein has said with reference to recent events in Germany:

> Being a lover of freedom, when the revolution came in Germany, I looked to the universities to defend it, knowing that they had already boasted of their devotion to the cause of truth: but no, the universities immediately were silenced. Then I looked to the great editors of the newspapers whose flaring editorials in days gone by had proclaimed their love of freedom: but they, like the universities, were silenced in a few short weeks. Then I looked to the individual writers who, as literary guides of Germany, had written much and often concerning the place of freedom in modern life: but they, too, were mute. Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing truth. I never had any special interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration, because the Church alone has had the courage and persistence to stand for intellectual truth and moral freedom. I am forced thus to confess that what I once despised I now praise unreservedly.

Enemies of human liberty are not confined to the more visible dictators. Persecution gets opportunity to raise its ugly head only when there is a relaxation of that moral self-discipline which characterises every decent condition of social habit and outlook. The leisure hour is the period of free self-revelation: we are known infallibly in the ways of our self-indulgence when we are relieved from the wholesome compulsions of daily toil. Judged by these standards, our moral advance can hardly be called spectacular in its character. The nightly drama of the flickering screen has more than realised the poet's wish. The "giftie" has been given us not only to see ourselves as others see us, but to hear ourselves as well. The result may be revelation, but it certainly does not bear a transcendental character. It requires considerable moral ingenuity to associate Hollywood with the schools of the prophets. It is true that from time to time mechanical ingenuity has been brought into the service of superb art to depict the memorable and noble in human life; and the "talkies" have provided for many of us a wholesome relaxation from the tensions of daily existence in honest laughter. But on the whole we are reminded of Thackeray's prologue to *Vanity Fair:*

> As the Manager of the performance sits before the curtain on the boards, and looks into the Fair, a feeling of profound melancholy comes over him in his survey of the bustling place. There is a great quantity of eating and drinking, making love and jilting, and laughing and the contrary, smoking, cheating, fighting, dancing and fiddling; there are bullies pushing about, bucks

ogling the women, knaves picking pockets, policemen on the look-out, quacks (other quacks, plague take them!) bawling in front of their booths, and youth looking up at the tinselled dancers and the poor old rouged tumblers, while the light-fingered folks are operating upon their pockets behind. Yes, this is Vanity Fair, not a moral place certainly, not a merry one, though very noisy.

It is probably not an exaggeration to suggest that the screen is by far the most potent single influence on present-day manners and morals. A more perfect educational medium for the ordinary mind could hardly be devised. The State cannot be indifferent to what happens in our "talkie" places night after night, and the view must be maintained that the very large capital interests which direct the picture industry cannot escape the vigilance of the censor by suggesting that they are only giving us what the public wants. The Roman Catholic Church in the United States has entered the field to defend the life of youth from the insidious suggestiveness of many films in which sensuality, intemperance and crime are portrayed as the heroic virtues. They have invited other Churches to form a "League of Public Decency," and the proposed weapon of attack is the boycott. If the threat is carried into operation, the trial of strength will be of no small interest to every student of present-day morals. In any case, we may keep in mind the remark of Theodore Beza—"The Church is an anvil that has broken many hammers." It is a safe prediction that she will find the sirens of Hollywood at least as formidable as the storm-troops of Germany.

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