

THE EUROPEAN TORMENT

T. KERR RITCHIE

HERR VON RIBBENTROP, the ambassador of the Reich, recently assured us that all Germans nowadays are accustomed to think historically. Suffering from the inevitable nightmares inspired by a surfeit of local legend the average native of Deutschland imagines himself a Siegfried surrounded by a ring of fire—*eine Welt von Feinden*. Naturally Fritz tightens his belt, exchanges his gold for dragon's teeth, and prepares to make all the necessary sacrifices; as befits a worthy son of Thor, imbued with the Aryan tradition which extends from the Inland Sea of Japan to the Nordsee.

The truth of the matter is that all the nations in Europe are engaged in thinking historically, and acting in accordance with what they consider to be their traditional virtues; but their thinking is confined to indigenous fictions, and their actions are utterly contemptuous of the great English poet:

No War, or battle's sound,
Was heard the world around:
The idle spear and shield were high up hung.
The hooked chariot stood
Unstained with hostile blood;
The trumpet spake not to the armed throng;
And Kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.

Hitlerism is aristocratic in essence, and thereby embodies somewhat of European tradition. It is a movement or a ferment of the German peoples; at once patriotic, political and economical. Much the same might be said of Fascismo, which was a revolt against worn-out systems of ideas; never well-rooted in the mercurial nature of the Italian people, and obviously destructive of patriotism and the family. In Italy history is studied and taught from a local point of view; and Virgil, Caesar, or Dante may take the place of popular heroes of the Germanic race—mythological or other.

The true European mind makes much of the spirit, the temper, the tradition of nationality. It builds upon history, and upon achievement; it appeals to the pride, the energy, and the spirit of sacrifice of the nations. Therefore it sees certain elements

of healthiness and vitality in this hectic revival of national rivalries. But the European does not believe in the sacrifice of one neighbouring nation by another as altogether a satisfactory method of settling terrestrial problems; that is a sign of infantile malnutrition, not of manly strength.

The difficulties which confront Europe are world-wide; they are in no sense confined to one particular enclave of the European continent. Studying national heroes, poets, and patriots may further national homogeneity and national ideals; but most of the European's troubles are of his own making, and smashing his civilisation into piecemeal, or surrendering to the illusion of material misty schisms, is a fool's way of reinforcing the intricate concrete fabric knit by centuries for the honour and glory of mankind. Let him hark to:

..... the beat
 Of the age's feet
 In strides of thousands of years;
 A muffled note
 That low doth float
 On history's breath to listening ears.

It was the European who began mathematics, which begat science, and which—in turn—begat applied science. He first uncorked the genii of materialism from the bottle wherein they had slumbered for centuries. To these genii the European owed much of his power and prestige; but they threaten to destroy him.

By dint of applying his science to the making of machines and material inventions without end, the European was able to sell the products of his machines in less favoured parts of the earth's surface where the genii were passive. To feed these mechanisms he drew on the natural characteristics of raw lands whose inhabitants he held in thrall by the power of his inventions and the strength of his religious convictions. In some cases he even displaced these natives for surplus population from his own continent; emigrants who continued—for a time—to supply the European's insatiable machines with raw products, and bought in exchange the European's industrial commodities.

Herein it has to be noted that once modern science was hatched out of geometry, it became an active embryo, a means of material power, a device for exploiting the planet, and ceased to be an artistic activity or an end in itself. Thus utility of knowledge was made akin to a commodity fit for popular usage or consumption, and infinitely desired by the world at large. The European's applied science has been distributed to a larger and larger circle of buyers,

imitated, perfected, and produced everywhere. The result is that the inequality which used to exist between the different regions of the earth in respect of the mechanical arts, and scientific methods of war and peace—the inequality on which European predominance was based—tends inevitably to disappear. Japan and South Africa are quite as familiar with machinery, electricity, or aeroplanes as Vancouver Island or Milan.

The native European also developed the technique of banking and realised the power of finance *en masse*; much about the same time as he began to apprehend the power of the individual *en masse*, or the machine *en masse*. All his forces, whether scientific, financial, or democratic, he made proportional to masses; and that is the main reason of his present day torture. For just so long as he could keep his superiority in machines, his standards of finance, and his democratic ideals, all leavened by a slowly decreasing power of Christianity and Aristocracy; just so long could he maintain the material standards of living which he came to build up at the cost of his spiritual and aesthetic integrity, and to which he has become accustomed.

The populace in most of what is commonly recognised as Europe attained a measure of material comfort and well-being to which there is probably no historical parallel. This meant employment, plenteous food supplies, a sense of security and independence leading to further material power, comparative freedom from natural catastrophes, and a wide diffusion of purely intellectual culture; in fact Europe as we have known it, and as it apparently disintegrates before our eyes:

Beauteous is life in blossom!
And it fleeteth—fleeteth ever;
Who so would be joyful—let him!
There's no surety for the morrow.

In these latter days the European is beginning to feel acutely that his science has lost its supremacy, having become world wide; his financial structure is no longer a mainspring of material security; and his concept of democracy is suffering an eclipse. His population wilts and withers before the machine economy; or if it increases, it has no outlet for its surplus. In fact the countries which might welcome this surplus are themselves impregnated with the materialist philosophy, and either produce raw products for export with a minimum of man-power and a maximum of machine power, as in the Dominion of Canada, or are active competitors in industrial products by means of the machine—which dispenses more and more with man-power, as in the United States of America.

Reacting to this world state of materialism, the European attempts to hedge himself with tariffs and trade restrictions. His financial values become as unsteady and undependable as Monte Carlo roulette. His democracies ask for butter and electric cookers when there is not enough milk or electricity to go round. They clamour for wages and employment, when neither wages nor employment can be found, save at the expense of juggling with finance and inventing more machines which throw more manpower on the scrap heap or in the trough of armaments. In short the European feels himself cabined, cribbed and confined by the ever-widening circle of foreign competitors who copy and improve that which the European first originated. Meanwhile he has:

No greater grief than to remember days
Of Joy, when misery is at hand.

The pity is that his memory does not go far enough back into the mists of Time. For him Time has become a commodity doled out by the clock, and his mind is overburdened by topical odds and ends with reference to Science, Communism, Militarism, Blum, Franco or Roosevelt. He is afraid to explore the depths of his own personality, as he considers himself only the elements of a cell; and the measure of the failure of character or individuality in the European of today corresponds exactly to the increase in his animal passion for the collectivity or the herd. He has lost the Lamp of Psyche.

In the course of their world flight, the genii of materialism have almost shattered the spiritual integrity of the European, and bereft him of aesthetic sense or any conception of the sublime. He has substituted materialist values for spiritual values; he has gained a world, but is in danger of losing his soul. Whereas his imagination was once upon a time employed in giving final forms to a truth which the senses had led him to infer, and the power of logic had woven into a single piece, it became entirely engaged in seeking material power and has turned aside from a co-ordinated contemplation of things; from absorption in the soul to absorption in the mass. Surrender to this illusion is rapidly leading him to destruction, waste and useless fluidity. He must regain his aristocratic poise, and surrender to religious and aesthetic forces which take no heed of the mere material values of things; but which, by spiritual insight, re-orient human culture and the destiny of humanity. For the more spiritual life is neglected, the more inward misery is discovered. The diminution of the inward spiritual life of the European individual is exactly the yardstick of his

subservience to the outward mass or the crowd. The European's civilisation is very fine, but it threatens to topple like a child's house of bricks, because the everlasting Kingdom is established in men's hearts and not outwardly to dazzle their eyes.

Christianity is the greatest revelation ever vouchsafed to humanity; but Christianity was originally the religion of the proletariat or the mass; it was in opposition to the more favoured classes. This aspect has strengthened the European mind in employing the genii of materialism towards the service of the mass, and disregarding the individual soul. Have not the poor in spirit been proclaimed as blessed for more than a thousand years? In the end they have come to believe that they alone are of any value; and no modern Christian teacher dares to show that Christ resisted the crowd of his day.

The essential aristocratic nature of Christ's teaching—of the Son of God himself—is smothered in cotton wool blankets of comparatively modern origin. What sort of humility is it on which his doctrine depends? Not subordination and lack of dignity; not that Time is money and not Eternal; but pure receptivity towards the influences which emanate from the profoundest depths. How ought one to love one's neighbour more than one's self? Not in the sense that other lives are more valuable than one's own, but in so far as the highest ideal is only to give and not to take.

The gradual deterioration of the Christian religion might be considered in terms of Mount Blanc. High on the summit St. Bernard de la Fontaine beholds the Madonna, while St. Bernard de Menthon viewing the Lac d'Annecy in the same region sees only the dead between Martigny and Aosta. Meandering by Chambery an eighteenth century Rousseau waxes sentimental over a rosy sunset reflected from the mountain's snow clad spine. A nineteenth century Genevois visualises the peak as representing *Le Petit Caporal*. A twentieth century European beholds a conical lump of sugar to be drained for electricity, quarried for bauxite, pierced by a tunnel, surmounted by an aeroplane, or utilized for winter sports.

Altogether the veritable spirit of Christianity, infected by the malevolent genii, has steadily lost its power of vision and illusion to invigorate and strengthen the individual soul, and its exponents no longer show forth or inculcate in their daily life the teachings of their Master. More St. Bernards are needed to behold the actual Christ, and others might turn aside from their rotten material idols and remember in the words of Blaise Pascal "*Jésus sera en agonie jusqu'à la fin du monde; il ne faut pas dormir pendant ce temps là.*"

Modern European society measures success in economic terms, and it inevitably eliminates all heritable or aristocratic ability above the normal. Therein it steadily deprives itself of leadership or stability, and howls in the material wilderness for their reinstatement! Not so long ago all commerce or industry was held to be degrading, no matter who engaged in those things. Traces of this lingering faith are yet to be found in the Highlands of Scotland, in Brittany, in Austria, and in Hungary. For true nobility is of the soil, in contact with nature, and has little to do with wealth or the lack of it. By spurning a relationship with the soil, and existing merely at second hand on the material benefits which can be derived from natural products through over-industrialisation, the nobleman has lost his poise and influence and has become himself spurious. The hereditary principle is contrary to the democratic or communist outlook on the universe; it cannot survive by absorption in the mass; it must be recalled to life. "Thou art for me a garden closed—Thou art like a hiltless sword—radiant, gleaming, but never brandished." (D'Annunzio).

Only through the rebirth or regeneration of Christianity and Aristocracy will the European again realise truth as an artistic activity or an end-in-itself; meanwhile he is in torment and travail. But after Orpheus had lost his ideal and been torn to bits by the Menades his lyre went on calling Eurydice! Eurydice! And signs are not lacking that under the present-day tension produced by the renaissance of the spirit of patriotism and ideals in the European nations, the full European faith may be reborn—if the Menades do not smash to atoms both Orpheus and his lyre.

Filled to saturation point with the prevailing miasmatic materialism, in more or less degree, each European nation discovers inferiority and suffering in its destiny which causes it to react in a further materialist sense. For instance, Germany turns to Great Britain and declares "We are a great people, and we must live; therefore we ask for raw materials and room for our surplus population". Such a demand is absolutely material. Admitted that a great nation must live, why should she live at the expense of other people, and what does she mean by "living"? Does living consist in manufacturing scientific devilries to kill other people who think they also have a right to live? Where is the Christianity or aristocracy in this sort of national whine? That a nation should seek a place in the sun by elbowing every other nation into darkness is exactly according to the modern philosophy.

Naturally politeness has decayed with the blossoming of the modern trinity, called Science, Democracy and Finance. Did

not Ernest Renan remark the same thing some time ago? However, hymns of hate are hardly in harmony with Christianity, and there is no reason why the German demands or the Machivellian questionings of discontented communities should not receive adequate attention.

Formerly ambassadors adjusted such trifles with new dancing pumps and bouquets of flowers, and the results were infinitely superior to those obtained in public forums, such as the moribund council at Geneva. Besides such peaceable methods; by dim candle light; provided us with respectable periodicals which gave us culture of some value, rather than scare headlines which induce dyspepsia or brain fag; though the infallible remedy is generally to be found fully advertised on the opposite page. Did not General Gordon pacify China with a walking stick? Such Christian or aristocratic methods are regarded as obsolete, but their revival would indicate a return to sanity and politeness more in accordance with European civilisation than wasting coal or oil in ordering battleships and aeroplanes about, while humble citizens are reduced to going without oil in the lamp of their soul, or selling their gold-plated teeth.

These uncouth demands—backed by bombs and uniforms—for the expansion of a nation or a race, through a further use and expansion of the topical Holy Trinity, need further consideration. Instead of allowing his science to take charge of him, and go shooting like a falling star throughout the universe, the European would be better advised to control his appetites. Instead of controlling masses of people with cudgels, and promises which can never be fulfilled, it is high time he began to control his machines.

But Peaceful was the night
Wherein the Prince of Light
His reign of peace upon the earth began.