CURRENT MAGAZINES

Pierre Laval:—Mr. Robert Dell, in the *Nation*.

Laval's Rise to the French Premiership:—Prof. O. G. Guerlac, in *Current History*.

French Policy in the World Crisis:—Mr. H. R. Westwood in the *Fortnightly*.

A French View of the World Crisis:—M. Pierre Lyautey, in the *Nineteenth Century*.

National Socialism in Germany:—Mr. E. T. S. Dugdale in the *English Review*.

Germany Turns from Junkerism:—Herr Emil Ludwig, in the *Contemporary*.

CONSIDERABLE attention has been given in recent magazines to the new Premier of France, not only because the succession to so great an office must always be of world interest, but also because M. Laval since he became Premier last June has been touring hither and thither on urgent negotiation with Great Powers. What manner of man is he? The answer to that may help one to guess the negotiation he will conduct. Mr. Robert Dell, who has been for many years correspondent in Paris of the *Manchester Guardian* and the New York *Nation*, sketches the outline of his character. We know these journalistic sketches surely well enough, by this time, to be able—in apostolic phrase—to use without abusing their vivacity and their charm. Under the limits proper to such causerie this article, like another on the same subject by Professor Guerlac in *Current History*, will be found very suggestive.

Pierre Laval is a self-made man, and it is perhaps needless to add that he is a lawyer. Frenchmen, without any further information about him, will guess that he must also have had some sparkling record as a journalist and as a Socialist, for it is only such engaging qualities which can carry a man, even *via* the profession of law, from the humblest origin to the premiership of France before he is forty-eight. M. Laval's father kept a meat store in a small village of the district of Auvergne; and all who write about him seem to warn us, rather unpleasantly, not to forget that he is an *Auvergnat*. That district of Central France is known to the historian as having produced from its hardy rural stock some notable figures both in thought and in action—leaders of Jansenism in philosophy, a Lafayette in war, a Polignac in council. But it seems that the Auvergnese are now noted chiefly for a certain political adroitness, the capacity to turn sharp corners, and a gay freedom from the

embarrassments of consistency. Mr. Dell makes clear to the reader exactly what this means when he adds that *malin* is, among such people, a highly complimentary epithet. One is not surprised to learn that M. Laval, a typical son of Auvergne, took M. Briand for his idol, and that M. Briand has long made M. Laval his protégé.

This young Premier, one of the two youngest, says Mr. Dell, that France has had in the present century (and in all conscience she has had a good many in that time) is among the men whose record during the Great War was temporarily fatal to their political advancement, but who have recovered in the national recoil more than all they had lost. In 1914 Pierre Laval was thirty years old; he had been practising law for some years in Aubervilliers, a suburb of Paris, where—according to Professor Guerlac—the Socialist label is as essential to lawyers "on the make" as the Democratic label is in Georgia; and he had just been returned as a fiery Socialist deputy for that district to the Chamber. But the events of July and August, 1914, depressed for a considerable time the stock of the party to which he had attached himself. M. Laval was spokesman of the policy he called "peace by negotiation," and France became increasingly impatient of that sort of language. So in 1919 not even the Socialist constituency of Aubervilliers would elect him to the Chamber. But it was willing to make him Mayor, and in relative obscurity for the next five years he practised law in that suburban area, with municipal management to occupy his spare time.

It was in 1924 that the fickle tide of public favour turned again, and M. Laval got back into politics. But he seems to have come back a changed man. Perhaps he could say with Mr. Bernard Shaw: "About this time I opened a small banking account and became comparatively Conservative in my political opinions!" Anyhow, instead of his earlier, clear-cut decisiveness for the Socialist party, he has shown during the last seven years what Mr. Dell calls the characteristics of a political "dark horse". He separated himself from all recognized groups, and four years ago he forsook the Chamber of Deputies for the Senate, to which he was elected as one of the ten senators for the Department of the Seine.

We hear that he is eminently "adaptable", and as he got rid of the commitments of his more impetuous (or perhaps more ingenuous) youth, he fast made his way in politics by hard work, debating talent, and attractive manner. In successive, and curiously different, administrations M. Laval has been Minister of Public Works, President of the Council, Minister of Justice, Minister of Labour. A versatile man indeed, not only in the

variety of work he can undertake, but in the speed with which he can develop a new allegiance, like a lobster growing a new claw! It recalls what Lecky once said about the "strange ductility of belief and conduct" which enabled not a few English clergymen to retain their preferments through the successive changes under Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth. In France, as elsewhere, there are shorter and more unpleasant names for this sort of temperament, especially among politicians, and the Socialist leader seems surest of all to be suspected when he abandons a cause after it has been made to serve his own turn. But such insinuations, so easy to make, so hard to refute, have no doubt an equal relevance to all parties. From which group the first stone can with least obvious absurdity be thrown at another, would be difficult to say, for statistics of personal advancement through party betrayal have not yet been comparatively tabulated. Mr. Dell pays the present French Premier the compliment of saying that of the two men it is more desirable to have him to deal with than M. Briand, for M. Laval will at least talk business rather than rhetoric, he is open to reason, and he is extremely astute. But we get this disturbing piece of advice at the close: "Be quite sure that any agreement you make with him is perfectly clear and free from all ambiguity, and see that he signs it."

These personal estimates, though plainly very conjectural, are diverting. Of wider and deeper interest is the story of M. Laval's recent trip to Washington, in which he was closely followed by Signor Grandi, Foreign Secretary in the Mussolini Government at Rome. The magazines have had much to say about these trans-Atlantic excursions, of very busy men and at a very busy time. It must have been a purpose both important and urgent that compelled them. To Mr. Westwood at least, who writes about it in the *Fortnightly Review*, the explanation is simple. M. Laval went in hot haste to interview President Hoover because a movement for the extension of the moratorium beyond the date when it is due to expire (in July, 1932) had made such obvious progress in the United States. He observed that American bankers were urging the need to prolong the moratorium for three or four years if it was to be of any real service to world recovery. And he realized how powerful would be such a plea as Americans came to feel that their own economic stability was bound up with that of other countries, so that Europe too must be stabilized if they were not to be involved in Europe's fate. They were drawing a moral from the long procession of their bank failures, the figures of unemployment rising to seven or eight million, and a demand for "dole" growing ever more strident.

According to the critic in the *Fortnightly*, what is troubling the French is not the catastrophe to European credit, but the danger that this may lead to a demand for revision of the Treaty of Versailles. He points out that throughout the greater part of the world crisis there has been a curiously complacent tone in the French press. It has probably reached its highest point in the advice preferred by the *Action Francaise*, that now is the time to take advantage of the desperate state of the German finances and press forward French policy. The situation, in short, is to be "exploited"! To other members of the recent League Assembly at Geneva, their French colleagues had far less the anxious look of men trying to save a Europe which had fallen into peril, than the exultant look of mortgagees about to foreclose upon a debtor, at a time when property sure to recover its value may be bought in extremely cheap. Under such circumstances, the one cause for anxiety on the face of Shylock is lest his victim should be rescued, and the fault on which he is surest to dwell is that of being "sentimental."

So to prevent sentimentality in President Hoover, M. Laval—according to this interpretation—betook himself to Washington. It was distinctly disquieting to hear that Mr. Hoover had disarmament very much in mind, and that he had even begun to emphasize it in his speeches. It was known, too, that Signor Grandi was about to cross the Atlantic, and what he might recommend was to be guessed from the recent speech of his chief at Naples. Mussolini had there dwelt upon the injustice of requiring Germany to disarm while armaments were increasing even beyond the pre-war scale in France, and he had referred to the need for a modification of those peace treaties "which have driven the world to the brink of material disaster and moral despair." It was plain that a further reduction in the scale of the reparations was here meant. Instead of the obvious inference, that if Germany defaulted on her payments, her territory must be re-invaded, and the French frontier definitely fixed where Nature intended it,—at the Rhine!

How far M. Laval succeeded in his mission of preventing the White House from turning sentimental, it is not easy for us to judge. The press organs of his party in France give a glowing account of the effectiveness with which he operated on the mind of President Hoover. They say that he stopped a rash impulse to press for disarmament, that he discredited the idea of revising the peace treaties, and that he secured a definite promise of "No Extension of the Moratorium." According to one enthusiastic French writer, M. Laval so overwhelmed the American President that every objection to the French view of reparations was with-

drawn, and the French attitude to security as a prerequisite of disarmament was cordially approved, apparently with apologies for having allowed any other thought even a temporary lodgment in one's mind! France too, we learn, was commissioned to negotiate with the other countries of Europe regarding the terms on which any further financial concession should be made to them from Washington.

Putting aside such propagandist nonsense, one turns to what a really distinguished Frenchman—M. Pierre Lyautey—has to say in his article "A French View of the World Crisis." The policy of his countrymen, he tells us, is no piece of impulsive rashness, but has been adopted after a very deliberate weighing of possibilities, and M. Laval is leading his Cabinet "with the slow and cautious step of the mountaineer." Here the writer will find few to dispute with him. Lack of caution is not the prevailing reproach, and his statement of the care with which French diplomacy is now managed will rather elicit from hostile critics what are known in parliament as "ironical cheers." But he goes on to explain that by care he does not mean a cunning and far-sighted selfishness. He means the watchfulness prescribed to intelligent Frenchmen (1) by the spectacle of Germany's present state, (2) by the world crisis in finance, expecially the loss to French revenue through the moratorium, (3) by the history and memories of German methods in the past.

Over the third of these considerations the British reader is likely to pass rather quickly, not because he is unsympathetic, but because he feels that to escape from such constant obsession by "the past" is the first requirement for those who would build a new world order. That eminent theologian, Karl Barth, put very vividly to a German audience some years ago the need to forget many an old tradition and to face a new world. You cannot safely think, he said, in terms of fifty years back at this present moment "when the negro is on the Rhine, Lenin is on the throne of the Tsar, and it takes two thousand German marks to exchange for a dollar." But M. Lyautey's point seems to be that though circumstances vary, the spirit of man remains the same, and he recalls the assurance of twelve years ago that "we were entering upon a new and exceptional era," adding his satiric comment that the old Adam soon reappeared. It is a strange psychology this, about the permanence of human nature in a world of change! And the satire is as cheap as the psychology is superficial. Those who still refuse to despair, and who think they see clear signs that, though the "millennium" is still deferred, things would be much

worse internationally but for the spirit and influence of the League, will pass on to M. Lyautey's other points.

He feels, with M. Laval, that Germany has been "posing" before the world, and that her pleas of poverty are an artifice. Someone told him exultantly in Berlin, just after the Hoover moratorium was declared, that France was now altogether isolated, and that the whole moral weight of world opinion was with the Germans. "All this publicity about her misfortune was produced on the screen with a sense of stage-craft which should be envied." M. Laval adds that if Germany is bankrupt, this is her own fault, and that she has been applying to the adornment of her cities what should have been used for the payment of her debts. It does not seem to be denied, however, that she has some six millions of unemployed; and that this—the most convincing evidence of distress—should be manufactured by her publicity men does not appear credible. We know those unemployed too well elsewhere, and we know that a publicity "stunt" has nothing to do with it.

The effort to conclude a German customs union with Austria, in defiance it seems of the Treaty of Versailles, and prevented only by a dexterous stroke from the Bank of France, is among the occurrences which this critic thinks of evil omen. "The whole course of history is there to prove that no good for the cause of peace has ever appeared on the horizon when the Cabinets of Vienna and Berlin have been too closely leagued together." Then there are the vociferations of the Hitlerites, and the parades of the Steel Helmet Society, whose widespread influence is unquestionable, and whose designs there is not even an attempt to conceal. "We are reproached," says M. Lyautey, "for not coming to the assistance of those who announce *urbi et orbi* that they are going to set our house on fire." And, finally, there is the money crisis. Mr. Hoover, we learn, was moved by the S. O. S. signals from Berlin, and granted a moratorium by which France was very heavily a loser. It was needful to procure compensation for this deficit in the Budget. And what about the complaint of gold buried in such huge quantities in the vaults of French banks, so that it is fast becoming a question whether France or America has a greater quantity of the precious metal? Here is a paragraph worth quoting:

> The gold which came to France did not arrive there by virtue of a decision of the Government. There is no force in the world which can prevent it from entering. In this sphere laws have no invalidating power. Gold came to France for the reason that it was put in trust there, and for no other...But to-day, when

> safety is a rare thing, France regards herself as the guardian of a great responsibility. She has no right to squander the funds that have thus been entrusted to her safe keeping. If she is one of the pillars of world security, she must in this manner keep herself from entering upon adventures.

There is not only truth but timeliness in this account of the "hoarding" of gold, to which so many critics have attributed world disaster. Nor should anyone, at least of British blood, have any inclination to underrate the French insistence on "security," both financial at present and political for the days to come. There is at the moment some sharpness of feeling over tariffs. M. Lyautey expresses the astonishment of his countrymen that though huge credits were granted by the Bank of France to the Bank of England when the pound was so imperilled, almost immediately afterwards a prohibitive tariff was laid on French imports into Great Britain. We know, too, how an extra fifteen per cent duty on British imports into France has lately been imposed, professedly because of "the drop in sterling," and in complete forgetfulness that no such measure was adopted six years ago by England when the franc not only dropped but pretty nearly disappeared. These grounds of passing quarrel, however, should not obliterate the memory of the ideals which the two nations share, of the sacrifices they made together, and of the very real perils which they may be called on to confront in alliance again. But the friendship we all desire to preserve will be preserved best in an atmosphere of candid and outspoken criticism.

THE internal affairs of Germany have been discussed in recent British magazines by publicists more detached than either M. Lyautey or M. Laval. Mr. E. T. S. Dugdale, writing in *The English Review*, has set forth the main features of the Hitler Movement, together with a sketch of the personality of its leader. Adolf Hitler is a comparatively young man of Austrian birth, who served as a volunteer with the German army in the Great War, and though he is freely spoken of as a possible candidate for the presidency of the German Republic, he is legally disqualified by his origin even from being a member of the Reichstag. But *inter arma silent leges*, and a revolution may achieve a great deal more than the abrogating of a legal disability.

Hitler's parentage and upbringing were humble. He is the sort of man who would have had no chance in the Germany of pre-war days, when every important post in either government or army was held by a nobleman. The ex-Kaiser, Herr Ludwig

reminds us in the *Contemporary*, had a great fancy for creating new nobles, whose fortune was ensured by the possession of landed estates which were entailed upon the eldest son. From this class of land-holding nobles, known as *Junkers*, all leading officials of the Reich were chosen. But that is a thing of the past. The Republic abolished all titles of nobility, and by abolishing entail for landed estates it impoverished the *Junkers*. Those sons of nobles under the Hohenzollern régime are no longer men of leisure. The great majority of them have had to work, and they are working with no good will to the Republic which degraded them.

Hitler indeed is of a very different class. But, as an enemy of the republican constitution, he has allied with him several sons of the ex-Kaiser, numerous princes of other days, and a considerable sprinkling of noblemen. He is leader of the Young Germany which repeats with fierce emphasis that it did not make the War, and hence will not be held responsible for the War's consequences. If it despises the blundering of the old régime that acted in 1914, it despises still more the blundering of five years later. Hitler has set forth both his principles and his programme in the two volumes entitled *Mein Kampf*. First, he demands a union between Germany and Austria, that is *German* Austria, not the miscellaneous non-Teutonic races whose patron was the Archduke Francis Ferdinand,—that victim of "the goddess of eternal justice and inexorable retribution." One catches one's breath to read that sentence, when one remembers how the Great War began. But Hitler cannot bear even the name of the old Habsburg dynasty, because their policy was so pro-Czech, and they were thus the deadly enemies of Germanism. Neither can he bear the "international Jew," who has settled in Germany since the War, making large profits out of the national disaster. The anti-Semite spirit of this movement is indeed constantly obtruded. But the leader has a great tenderness toward Mussolini, despite what happened in the South Tyrol a few years back. No wonder! The ideas of nationalism and dictatorial rule which Adolf Hitler favours for his own country are very like those which Mussolini has made so effective in Italy. What he promises, if he should get sufficient support to have his way, is to repudiate the acknowledgment of "war-guilt" as made under duress, to repudiate in consequence all responsibility for "reparations", and at the same time to insist that all private or commercial debts be paid to the last dollar. Anti-Semitism, anti-Communism, and the Flag of a revived pan-German nationality!

It is not surprising that the French, seeing how Hitlerism has swept Germany, and how it promises to conduct its chief to

dictatorial power, are on the watch against making an indiscreet move at the solicitation of the League of Nations or of anyone else. For it is plain that many different sorts of support for a new German patriotism are now being consolidated across the Rhine. The Junker influence, Herr Ludwig warns us, though formally crushed by the republican constitution, is still very powerful in practice in rural Germany. It has profited much of late by the general disappointment. Things have gone wrong industrially, among the Germans as elsewhere, and the glowing promises, expressed or implied to the masses about distribution of land, have not been carried out. So, in disgust with the party in power, there is a rush to a party which can hardly do worse, and which undertakes to do a great deal better. Moreover, the survivors of the Imperial army, with the sons of those who did not survive, have not lost the spirit which it took so long to build up. One does not blame the French for their anxiety. But one may well doubt whether they are not just now taking the surest way to strengthen the forces that they dread.

According to Sir George Paish, if we don't all mend our methods, there is a world economic breakdown not more than a few weeks ahead. Without endorsing quite so dismal an outlook, one may agree that things do indeed look black. But perhaps what the old proverb has taught us to call a silver lining in dark clouds may be seen just in the compulsion this may bring to conclude an international bargain at the Conference on Disarmament. "Let's all hang together," said one of the group that gathered round the table to sign the Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies. "Yes," said Franklin, "for if we don't, there is a very fair chance that we shall all hang separate." Such is a parable of the world situation to-day. At first sight, in the face of soaring budgets for National Defence, it may seem absurd to cherish any sanguine expectations from the Conference of next month. It is estimated that the aggregate expenditure on armed forces by Europe and America is now actually greater by some $750,000,000 than it was six years ago. But vast expenditure for a while may be the surest guarantee of rigorous economising afterwards, and economic necessity may thus turn out the most reliable safeguard of peace. Cynics have often foretold that, amid much affectation of virtue, the nations would one day come together, not on the basis of a common sympathy, but on that of their common indigence. If this should happen, the financial pressure will have been worth while.

In the pages of this REVIEW, exactly ten years ago, a distinguished contributor put the case in language which now seems to have been prophetic. Mr. Francis W. Hirst, in an article he wrote for our issue of January, 1922, under the title "Why Civilized Nations Should Disarm," summed up the situation as follows:

> Thus debts increase by leaps and bounds, paper money deteriorates, confiscation of private property extends, investors lose all faith in Government paper and Government loans and Government promises. There is only one way of averting world-wide bankruptcy and a general collapse of credit. That way is a drastic reduction of public expenditure to a level which can be covered by a reasonable or at least tolerable system of taxation. To achieve this there must be a general disarmament, as well as a cessation of wars; for economies in the civil administration, however severe, would be in most cases insufficient.

We did not accept this wise prescription ten years ago. Are we ready to accept it now? Or not until a point has been reached at which acceptance will be of no avail?

H. L. S.