IS FRANCE A FRIEND OF PEACE?

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TO many Canadians, France's fears of a rearming Germany are proper return for her *intransigeance* to a disarmed enemy. It is no friend of temperance who fills the country with Prohibition officers; it is no friend of peace who rings her frontiers with forts, and masses an empire's manhood in the largest conscript army outside of Russia. Fear destroys security; but the security sought by France, made up of strong armaments in a country only second-rate in population, actually fosters fear. French armament is actual evidence of her distrust. Now distrust of a powerful neighbour is fear; and so French armament completes the vicious circle which induces war. This is the case against France. Let us answer for her.

In the first place—and not without a good case—France believes that she is the chief home and bulwark of that attitude to life and of that complex of institutions which we call civilization. The argument for this creed is based on familiar ground; French family stability, the French art of living, the clarity of the French mind, the universality of French democracy, the ingrained individualism of French character; but these cannot prove the French claim unless it can also be proved that France is a friend of peace. No one in our day can be a friend of civilization who is not also without shadow of doubt or qualification a friend of peace.

This statement may not always have been true, for peace, oddly enough, is not a peculiarity of civilization, but inherently otherwise. Almost exactly as people are civilized do they run the danger of war; it might even be maintained that exactly in so far as nations are civilized are they capable of war. But the greatness and the permanence of that civilization lie to a large extent in its ability to keep the peace of nations. The popular belief among our statesmen, that the natural progress of nations is from a state of brutal strife to one of complex peace, is false anthropology and bad history. The nomad Eskimo is less capable either of conceiving warfare or of engaging in it than is industrial Toronto. Peace, unfortunately, becomes increasingly difficult as civilization advances. Herein lay one of the first problems to be faced by Christianity. Born into a high civilization, she alone survived a welter of warfare. In her fitful struggle against war and other incompatible

forces the Church made many compromises, but also significantly came to be, in the minds of many people, an enemy of civilization. France to a greater extent even than England ignores the authority of the Church in politics. For her, civilization is the supreme good. So the problem remains peculiarly hers: a friend of civilization must also be a friend of peace.

Some of us believe that France is indeed a safe guardian of peace. The French have not been good propagandists of their cause. Their leaders do not ordinarily bring to their declarations the vague and chaotic but superficially impressive mysticism of the Germans, nor the slap-dash Christianesque ethics dear to the type of mind now prominent in English politics. But more candidly France holds to peace on a realistic civilized basis—on a materialistic basis, perhaps. If even this is true, it is reason to hale France as a friend of peace. And it is by this kind of argument that France has persuaded herself.

No one who knows the French people suspects that the spirit of militarism, or even its misleading imitation, the desire to parade and be in uniform, has any place in their profoundly businesslike and therefore peaceful spirit. A French parade is one of the most unmilitary of spectacles, exceeding in *civilianness* the business man's walk that distinguishes American processions. The drill and organized music and militant singing that characterize even the most harmless German street manoeuvres are strange and barbaric to the Frenchman: strange, because he is unacquainted with them save under the artificial and deliberate discipline of the army; and barbaric, for they represent to him that inherently brutal tendency of the German character in mass action. The Germans, who in their greatest moments are gentle and divided, become progressively violent as they unite. In social life this is a familiar experience; in national life it is one of the most ancient themes in European history. So the French people, growling perpetually about conscription, dare not give it up in the face of millions of German civilians drilling daily. The paradox of armament along the Rhine continues: Frenchmen conscribe themselves with loathing; Germans have to be forbidden to do so.

Perhaps the same idea may be clearer and more pertinent in political terms. The French have long been a nation. Notorious for political differences, they have none the less developed a unity of mental habit and intellectual discipline, a unity of domestic organization, of artistry in intimate and otherwise humble affairs, which distinguishes them everywhere. For many generations they have formed a centralized State (psychologically blended with a

compact and substantial part of the earth), which has long since been built up from the formative core, Paris and the Ile de France. This region remains one of the most fruitful nuclei of civilization. Military service, with the whole ritual of armament and national defence, is for a modern Frenchman merely a public duty to his political deity (now middle-aged), the Nation-State. This duty may be unpleasant or unfairly distributed and so, like the similar duty of paying taxes, may be an irksome compromise with the Latin individualism; but this military service, loyally accepted as a necessity under certain circumstances, may, like the duty of administering justice, acquire a certain noble austerity provoking marks of honour and even of privilege. But any specific privilege belonging to military service is subject to its author, the Nation-State, which is essentially democratic and pacific. Socially, the French army is the French people; as an institution, it is only an arm of the government. As far as the mass of the French people are concerned, the army does no more to provoke war than does the police force to provoke crime. They may misinterpret their own psychology, but there is no emotion of militarism in their attitude.

This social merging of the army in a society fundamentally peace-loving is preserved by the parliamentary supremacy in French politics. In no other of the great democracies does parliament retain such a reality of power. It not only reigns and legislates, but it governs. Through its committees and interpellations it affects administration in a way peculiar among parliamentary governments. No bureaucrat can be more exasperatingly bureaucratic than a French official; no General Staff can at times be more exotic in personnel or more esoteric in doctrine than the French E. M. G.; but control finally remains with the politician, the much abused amateur. France knows all the tricks of democratic corruption, but one development, not necessarily corrupt, she has kept at a minimum—the rule of the specialist. The amateur still rules in France. This is the social basis for both Toryism and the old-fashioned Liberalism, for both republicanism and constitutional monarchy. All classes feed the professions in France in a way rare in Europe, but all the professions are subject to the amateur as they are nowhere else. Civil strife breaks out at the suspicion that the bureaucrat in administration, the Staff in the army, a religious teaching Order in education, an industrial or class-conscious *bloc* in parliament, threatens to impose its professional conclusions on policy. That kind of prejudgment is a prejudice no Frenchman will tolerate.

Now this rule of the amateur is no guarantee of efficiency of purity, or even of enlightenment, though in all these ways France's governments maintain a passable standard. In only one direction is the ultimate and decisive control of the amateur likely to serve the highest ends,—as a servant of peace. The French nation, at least as effectively as the only older nation, England, can still discipline her servants, the courts, the teachers, the bureaucrats, the army.

A glance at the situation in Germany will throw the differing French character into higher relief. Every commentator on the German people, ever since commentators could read and write, refers to the essential political ineffectiveness of the Germans. Gregarious in most of the happier ways of sociability, contributors to most of the great arts and especially the more sociable ones, docile and individually friendly, the German people through some fate of history have escaped a disciplined unity such as now binds the equally variegated constituents of France. Different psychologies with different mental disciplines leading to wide eclecticism, anarchy, or pessimism have left Germany open to a tragic series of political failure. The wasted energy of the great Folkwanderings (which by waste of energy became the Dark Ages in Germanic lands), the crumbled hopes of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation during the Middle Ages, the ruinous incompleteness of the religious Reformation, the deep yearnings and unintelligent enthusiasm of the Revolutionary period stifled by enslavement to each war-lord in turn, the impotence of German liberalism in the nineteenth century, and the chaos of the Germany that we know, form a tragic sequence that is the history of Germany. And now that Hitler promises to make Germany less futile, many consider that the tragedy has been deepened.

This is not the place to look for the causes of this German tragedy. Ill-service of her rulers suggests that Germany lacks some spiritual quality to be so uniformly ill served. Nevertheless, the despairing defeatist German of the recent generation had moments when he believed that Germans were approaching something closer than ever before to unity. Lacking a definite symbol of that unity, lacking a single spiritual training, Germans turn now as usual to the symbols of their gregariousness. The Youth Movers and Wanderbirds of the last decades are now characteristically gathered into the ranks of angry political armed bands. Just as the quickly despairing German of the nineteenth century turned to Prussian militarism for unity, so the new yearnings, ever prone to panic, from lack of a more fundamental symbol or unifying

intelligence, take form in the militant discipline of the Nazis. The very lack of underlying unity turns German passion into the superficial unities of military organization, or, more accurately, to the all-embracing unity of mystical nationalism. It is the Assumption of the German *Volk.*

The same lack of general social unity hitherto allowed the control of politics to pass from the mass of amateurs into the hands of the specialists—in justice, in education, in adminstration, in the army. In Germany the specialist spoke with an authority he lacked in more sophisticated democracies like England and France. Judges, teachers, officials, soldiers command respect in any well-ordered State; but they are none the less prone to compromise with freedom. In Germany alone did they acquire the authority reserved in western States for the individual in mass. These militant minority groups in Germany, undigested in a common weal, these ardent professionals, sometimes spark the fire of the nation and construct not unattractive dreams of a new polity; but they are not democratic as we have understood democracy since the French Revolution, nor are they of the stuff of a republic as we have known republicanism since the days of Rome.

This freak of a republic, this alien among democracies, brings a peculiar danger with its armed parties. The effort of one more national struggle is whipping these parties into line; Germans are probably emerging just a little more united than they did from 1870 and from 1919. The common enemy may easily be found, as on other occasions, across the vague borders of *Deutschtum,* or, what is not very different, in the clouds with the Treaty of Versailles. France is vitally aware of this new and yet so ancient German turmoil, with its drill instead of order, and with its acid effect on society. That inner German turmoil is the most persistent enemy to peace in Europe, now as in the past. To the Frenchman, this is a psychological and political fact, not a moral judgment. Communism in Russia, an admitted enemy of our society, has a philosophy; it is positive, and can be gauged and measured. The intervening mass of German despair and intellectual disease is immeasurable, and for just that reason is immediately terrifying. One hundred million Communists who know where they are going are a menace to be met, but on a battle-ground of common choice. Like the Frenchmen, they are practical materialists. But eighty million Germans who do not know where they are going are a more persistent and immediate danger. They are idealists, active mystics, who out of self-distrust turn to follow a Gleam. Now Frenchmen do not hold with Gleams, and distrust violent men who see them.

This fear among Frenchmen is as poisonous to them as is pessimism among the Germans, and it may not be enlightened, but it cannot be called militarism. It is composed of the denial of the essence of militarism, drilled control by specialists.

Common sense in its literal meaning has therefore been displaced where it should be supreme, in international affairs. Frenchmen are united exactly by that common sense of society; a common sense is exactly what is lacking in Middle Europe. So on the frontiers of common sense the French erect their armed barriers against the forces of spiritual disunion. The disciplined French nation, by its very maturity and sufficiency, needs peace; the German disciplining groups, by reason of their incompleteness, do not need peace. Or, as they put it, France, bloated, is static; Germany, stripped for action, is dynamic.

The French government also stands characteristically and pre-eminently for Law; not only because the international law of the moment seems to favour them rather than Germany—Frenchmen often do not think so; but because a process of law alone has authority for Frenchmen, and alone should receive sanctions. So it was the French army and no other that was offered to the League of Nations, and the United States of Europe is an essentially French idea. What is now law must be expanded to become a greater law, and to make that possible the sanctions of law must not be abolished (to fall into other hands) but be passed to the organs of the new law. The German comment on most western proposals for a re-organized world is that eighty milion Germans have right to an influence commensurate with their numbers. This argument has little meaning for a Frenchman. The man-power of a nation cannot in the least affect its rights, though it does obviously affect its military strength.

It is therefore natural that France has gathered about her most of the small States of Europe. To the German mind, specialist to the last, this was a military diplomatic compensation for the loss of the Russian alliance. The specialist on the Quai d'Orsay probably welcomes the friendship of small States for the same reason. But France is not run by her Foreign Office, and the mass of amateurs who quite blithely fashion governments weekly to their own ideas are friendly to small nations because any sacrifice to the rule of numbers is uncivilized. It makes for war by allowing the chief argument for war: that military strength in itself creates new rights.

So the question of security now, and the lesser question of reparations earlier, centred for Frenchmen around political ideas, and not merely on clauses of the Treaty of Versailles, as France's

enemies believe. Frenchmen will discuss Versailles at Geneva, but nowhere else, for Geneva alone has jurisdiction. In the same way a conference of specialists or a discussion by political dictators can never be final or of ultimate importance. The astute Briand asserted continually: "I know nothing". Democratic peoples speak authoritatively through their parliamentary agents, not through regimented statisticians or professional ethicists. Undemocratic organs of expression are suspect.

There have been indeed many apparent inconsistencies in French practice, and the French point of view is not always the loftiest, though it is usually the clearest. The French are as blind to the mystical national feelings of the Germans as they are to the colour prejudices of South Carolina imported into Mainz. But the final and first blindness of the Frenchman, his most exasperating obtuseness, remains in his identification of France with civilization. He might make a better case if he did not assume it so universally; we should not be so irritated had he not so good a case. But the Frenchman also has the virtue of his conceit; he suffers no argument in international affairs that is not a civilized argument. Civilization is a delicate luxury in which some people are more at ease than others; it is peculiarly prone to violence, it must set itself resolutely against any compromise with the rule of numbers, there must be no repudiation of Law. Europe must go on from 1919 and not from 1914; the mistakes of the new must not be reformed by restoring the evils of the old. Peace, after all, is like civilization in that it rests on a common sense of unity to which all servants of that unity must give undivided allegiance. Communism at worst is an alien society struggling into a new law of its own well-being; but it can be debated and argued, defended and attacked. With chaos, the political chaos of recent Germany or the philosophical chaos of to-day, there can be no argument. Chaos is the denial of civilization, it marks the loss of hope in civilization; Hitler is a proper conclusion for spiritual defeatism. The French myopic view of German mysticism is dangerous for France, but it is eminently peaceful. Indeed Germans call it static.

Finally, the Frenchman adapts his trusteeship for civilization to a new positive philosophy. In France, and almost alone in France, we find a new philosophical movement giving modern meaning to the content of the Roman-Hellenic civilization which we have inherited. It is static, if that means it contains the grains of permanence; it is myopic, if that means it has its eyes on the road and not in the clouds. Modern civilization in France is not in-

delibly associated with all those forms of capitalism that frighten our young radicals into such strange alliances; but this new French school does attack all vagueness, defeatism, quackeries, shams, indisciplines, old and new Asiaticisms, all despairing escapes from the world of reality, which are so fashionable now among those suffering from the mystical spiritual diseases. An inner unity (not an outer absorption), a freedom of mind (not its assumption), a discipline with positive content (not just discipline), a society based upon the old adaptable institutions, family and property, and (for many) a disciplined religion, are the bases of this European civilization which is still bursting with fruit for those who will pursue the way to pluck it. Despair is the enemy of this civilization; compromises with force destroy it, though force is needed to defend it; sloppy mysticism enervates it and materialistic mysticism brutalizes it; it feeds on common sense. It is based on individualistic personality, free from the specialists' perversion of national personality. In France it is often preached in Catholic forms, though not exclusively. It does not claim incorruption for itself, but it is not overwhelmed by inefficiencies in the economic and political order. Capitalism, like the Avignon Papacy, must be put in its proper place, but none the less it contains the Truth and the Truth persists.

So this intellectual conceit of France claims to have a gospel to meet Russian Communism and German Chaos. Man, in France, talks back to Hegel. The hegemony France seeks is cultural, and she pursues it with all the fervour and ungracious singlemindedness of a prophet. France believes that she has long cried in a wilderness, and she has reason to think so when so often the noise of German moral defeatism is echoed in Britain and on this continent. The French gospel is that intellectual loyalty to civilization and a good dose of stiff upper lip will save the world. So far it has saved France and, incidentally, peace.

One may surely be a friend of peace who holds most firmly to the achievements of peace, who listens to no argument but the voice of reason, who makes no change but on the basis of law, who offers her forces to an international comity. All who live as Frenchmen live and share a Frenchman's understanding live for peace, which is the essence of both life and understanding. Life is a discipline and not a war. It is better to live for what we understand than to die for spiritual indigestion. This may not be a Kingdom of God on Earth, but it is at least a Republic for Men and not a *Reich* of spiritual unrest.