

TOPICS OF THE DAY

THE IRON HAND: WE DON'T WANT TO FIGHT: BOGEY-BOGEY:
AVE ATQUE VALE.

HERR HITLER and Mr. Roosevelt appear equally anxious to secure a four years' dictatorship. The Democratic President is at least sure of his term, and being the elected representative of a democracy, he is fairly sure—provided he clouds it with the right language and gestures—to obtain a large measure of absolute power. The high-pressure salesmanship of his election campaign has been followed up by an unmistakable announcement that the goods have been delivered. Something is being done. In an emergency, any activity is comforting; confident activity is tonic. The voice and appearance of the new President are inspiring; he radiates optimism, and seems unable to compose a sentence that does not contain some reference to "frankness," "courage," or "sincerity"—no bad catch-words at any time, and for present ills if not a specific at least a useful incantation when pronounced by a man who so obviously believes in their peculiar efficacy as administered by him. With the populace in his favour, his immediate supporters pacified, and opposition reduced to a minimum, Mr. Roosevelt will have every opportunity to demonstrate his abilities, and should obtain all the success he deserves. Meanwhile, the First Lady can minister to popular superstition by maintaining the hail-fellow tactics so dear to believers in democracy: helpful talks over the radio, the editing of a magazine devoted to babies, the first aeroplane journey to Washington by a President's wife (for an undisclosed urgency)—all of these help to convince an admiring populace that their absolute monarch is a man of the people.

Herr Hitler, on the other hand, has a more precarious tenure, and is constrained by circumstances as well as by nature to adopt correspondingly vehement tactics. His truculent hectoring has little to do with the popular faith that grows around an easy confident optimism; and considering the peculiar intricacies of German political machinery and the arbitrary temper of the German President, we need hardly wonder that the Chancellor appears more than a little anxious to be assured against the irritating uncertainties of criticism and opposition. Nor do his pronouncements by press and radio delight foreign ears with a cheerful ringing optimism for peace at home, good-will abroad. There is no lack of confidence, not to say arrogance, in the speeches that cross the Atlantic daily from German nationalist broadcasting stations; but

the note they strike is distressingly similar to one more familiar eighteen or twenty years ago than in recent years. The cadence of this perfervid rhetoric is set to the measured tread of the goose-step; its favorite word appears to be *Nationalismus*; its patriotism is all-pervading, and would be admirable if it were not so blatantly aggressive. Even that execrated term *Kultur* is being rapidly restored to its pre-war currency. Prussianism, in short, is once more rattling its sabre. And the assurance that Prussianism is to become pan-German becomes no more encouraging when considered in conjunction with Jewish progroms and the German retirement from disarmament conferences.

Just what Herr Hitler's "Nationalism" implies is a little difficult to determine. His general claims and repudiations are clear enough; and so no doubt are his pretensions, considered as abstract political theory. But in its practical implications Nationalism is to be distinguished from the Communism to which it is so violently opposed, by little save the direction of its hostilities. There is the same ruthlessness, the same intolerance, the same arbitrary suspension of personal liberty, the same inevitable emergence of a dictatorship from what professes to be popular government. The chief difference would appear to be that whereas communism aims to be chiefly economic and international, Hitlerism is chiefly national and military. Which of the two is preferable is a question to be decided by the individual.

Since the bulk of these excogitations was committed to paper, Hitler has been relieved by the granting of a dictatorship which will transfer his anxieties to interested spectators of the Nazi march to glory. His authority is perhaps not so much achieved as thrust upon him; but it makes him not less sinister that he should be the instrument by which the will of a von Papen or a Hugenberg can best be imposed upon a united Germany, if not upon the rest of Europe. Hitler's gesture the other day in welcoming sympathetic Austrian visitors to the gallery of the Reich suggests a political menace far beyond that of the Little Entente and more stable than most other possible alliances. Germany's evasion of the provisions of Versailles, and the various subterfuges by which she has accumulated munitions of war and provided for a virtual standing army, gave rise among French critics to almost hysterical denunciation before the threatened absolutism of Hitler, and now that it seems imminent provide cause for the gravest apprehension.

Meanwhile, with war taken almost for granted as a probable consequence of the present state of international economics and politics, the young men of Oxford—or a representative number of

them—have stated that if there is a war, they will not go. Even if the war should come to them, they say they will not join. Many people are very much upset; but regarded dispassionately the vote in the Union may be taken as one of the few hopeful signs in a somewhat gloomy world. To begin with, the decision was made as a result of a debate—and an academic debate at that—in which it was necessary to oppose extremes. A more timid liberalism would have welcomed such a decision, perhaps, as this: “That this House, while agreeing to support its country in any war in which it shall become involved without dishonour, would prefer not to have a war begun merely to provide an outlet for its martial enthusiasm.” Some such motion could doubtless be passed without serious criticism except from a few die-hards. But as subject for a debate, it might possibly be lacking in vigour and interest. Another trifling point to remember is that young men, especially enthusiastic young undergraduates, do not always regard a vote in debate as binding when circumstances have put them to the test. And another is that the young men represent the class from which soldiers are usually taken, while their critics do not. The direct courage, which says boldly that it does not intend to fight, is perhaps as good as that vicarious kind which cheers others on to go and fight for it. Perhaps the most disheartening incident in the whole dispute was the dispatch of white feathers—a symptom of panic that is more conducive to war than even the bellicose sputterings of Mr. Winston Churchill. Mr. Churchill’s personal courage is undisputed, even if it has not placed him in the fore-front of his technically brilliant if practically somewhat disastrous attacks. The present censure is for the most part reminiscent of the variety of stay-at-home patriotism that emanated from a class—usually in imminent peril of conscription—which came to be known as the “would-to-Godders”. (“Good-by, my boy, and would to God that I were able to go with you!”)

So far as can be ascertained, ex-service men have not shown either collectively or individually any great measure of apprehension at the news of this pacifist gesture, nor do they seem to share the view of arm-chair strategists that young fellows are not what they used to be. Perhaps they remember the exhortations with which the same critics pronounced the benediction on their departure for a war which was to end war, and the plaudits that the survivors received—for having made the world safe for democracy. If the Great War is succeeded by another within one or two decades, it will indeed have been fought in vain; perhaps our greatest hope lies in the very speed with which talk of war

as no remote and shameful possibility has been revived before distance has lent enchantment to the view. The young men of this generation of cannon-fodder have few illusions about the glories of war or its great achievements.

The critical temper of modern youth is a greater safeguard than the jingoism of the early days of the war or the natural enough enthusiasm that came after the Armistice. It has been suggested that the Oxford Union is not representative; that it is a club, which anyone can join, given over to immature discussions of politics; that their vote is to be taken less seriously than that of a club restricted exclusively to "the best people", devoted chiefly to the study of patterns for the club tie and the menus for club dinners, and regarding politics as matter for a May morning and a priceless rag.

The present attitude of the Oxford Union may be contrasted with that of a minority in the sister university some dozen years ago towards Mr. Norman Angell, whom for his pacifist views they placed in danger of his life. This group had little to do with the Union or with politics. It consisted chiefly of school-boys who had just missed the war, and lacking that purgation of ferocity, were full of an unusually bellicose spirit towards "bolshies" and "conchies", of which species of crawling things they regarded Mr. Angell as a particularly odious example. Their actions were not approved by the Union nor by constituted civic and academic authority, but doubtless received hearty approbation from elderly spinsters and retired majors of militia (home defence). The whirligig of time brings in its revenges. Mr. Angell is no longer a voice crying in the wilderness, but Sir Norman, and a respected critic and adviser, able to say "I told you so", and apparently to make his later warnings strike home. The paulo-post-bellum undergraduates are now presumably ensconced in the best chairs of the best clubs, and writing to the few remaining "sound" papers about the ante-bellum caution of the present generation and the lamentable consequences of letting high-brows go to college. Or perhaps they blame the influence of Rhodes Scholarships and the admission of women. If Cambridge should this year succeed in winning yet another boat-race, the moral degeneration of Oxford will be regarded as complete.

The chief point overlooked by the critics—unless matters are even worse than we have been led to suppose—is that England is not yet at war, nor even contemplating it. The young men showed at least a certain kind of courage in proposing their resolution and carrying it, in reaffirming their opinion unequivocally and restoring the page that had been torn from the minute-book with that

disregard for constitution so typical of an exasperated conservatism. It is not unreasonable to suppose that these young men of Oxford will show a not very different spirit from that of the undergraduates of Oxford and Cambridge in 1914, and that if acts of aggression are committed against their country, they will be on the average at least as ready to serve the interests of humanity as are their pugnacious critics. In any event, the question of who goes to the next war is of very little moment. The civilian population will bear a large share of the danger, and the soldier in the field will be no worse off than his brother from college who stays at home; nor indeed than the patriotic spectator who cheers him on to destruction. In which last happy thought there is a final ray of hope.

Almost as these words were written the newspapers reported that on March 25 the University of Alberta, through its debating Union, recorded a four-to-one majority in favour of refusing to bear arms, and that the same result was obtained from a poll of non-students present at the meeting. University students may perhaps be allowed a certain licence of opinion even in Canada; but if the general public expresses such revolutionary opinions, the effect on our humourless politicians may be serious. The loss of prestige resulting from certain recent efforts at suppression may possibly have tempered panic with a little caution in dealing with "subversive elements;" otherwise we should expect that if such a resolution were passed, immediate proceedings would be instituted for extradition. That at least appears to be the method which until recently has been most favoured for dealing with irresponsible utterances that threaten to disturb the serene composure into which the established order has been petrified. And so the unimaginative tremblings of our earnest guardians lend encouragement to the fanciful hopes of back-street revolutionaries by taking notice of their feeble cries and their tattered bogey of communism.

In spite of the publicity created by well-meant efforts at suppression, the most pessimistic observer of Canadian affairs can hardly attach to our own peculiar Bolsheviki the importance that is given them by those who proclaim themselves most anxious to preserve the moral and social integrity of this Canada of ours. Even if it were a serious crime to suggest that Russia is not in every respect invariably despicable, the number of Canadian citizens to be perverted by such insidious suggestions is so negligible as to make punitive reprisals superfluous. Our crack-brained revolutionaries are not worth the trouble of arrest, let alone of deportation. Nothing

perhaps could more clearly indicate our almost complete freedom from revolutionary "elements" than failure to excite them further by drastic repressive action on such trifling evidence as occasionally presents itself. There is little to fear from the type of mania that takes so quickly to the strait-jacket. The more serious and well-informed "revolutionaries" are so patiently reasonable as to be almost soothing to the perturbations of anyone disposed to speculate on the possible advantages of a political revolution. Nothing indeed could so restore one's faith in the essential rightness of things as they are, as to hear the gentle academic fulminations of Mr. Woodsworth.

Fortunately Mr. Woodsworth's antecedents and associations have been impeccable. Had he been possessed of a foreign-sounding name, or obliged to work with his hands, he might have been in danger of active efforts to have him sent to Russia, from which he would have been suspected of receiving financial as well as spiritual encouragement. And if he were to object to any such treatment, he might expect some of our anxious editors to explain that his unwillingness was due to the fact that even Russia had to draw the line somewhere.

Peter Verigin, who has contrived for the moment to score a point or two against the Departments of Justice and Immigration, is generally considered to be a mild enough person, like Mr. Woodsworth, except when roused. His disinclination to be handed over to the ministrations of the Soviets might almost have been construed as a mark to his credit, as might also the fact that he seems to exercise over his people a control less irksome and not less effective than that of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. But "*cet animal est très méchant; quand on l'attaque, il se défend.*" He dislikes coercion; so much so that he would rather exercise his legal right to imprisonment in Canada than accede to compulsory liberation in Soviet Russia. He is therefore considered beyond the shadow of a doubt to be an enemy to Canada and a lover of Bolshevism. Verigin's compliment to the Canadian régime seems to have been a little too subtle for official appreciation; but his patience must be wearing to a close, and there can be little to bind him to remain here with his simple-minded flock except a narrow-minded reluctance to abandon their painfully accumulated property to a State committed to the principle of private ownership.

There is no question that the Dukhobors offer an unusual problem to those who feel impelled to solve it. But since they desire merely to live their own life in their own way, and seem for the most part to be decent law-abiding citizens, it can hardly

be necessary to provoke them to bring the blush of modesty to the cheek of a trooper, and then charge them with indecency for doing so. Their more primitive customs are reserved for a few only, and seem to be harmless except to inquisitively sensitive neighbours. Verigin himself, with the majority of his followers, is in Carlyle's phrase "a Sansculottist, but no Adamite". He has already cut off his revolutionary whiskers, and if he can guarantee a large order of Canadian-made trousers from Ontario factories, his reputation may yet be saved.

THE New Year has taken from us three of the greatest figures, each in his own way, in the realm of contemporary English letters. Mr. George Moore and Mr. Saintsbury had each passed by a considerable margin, the first at 81, the second at 87, the ordinary span of life; and although Moore continued to conceal his age almost to the end, and Saintsbury's lighter vein produced a happy rejuvenation during the years of his retirement, the shock at their passing was different in kind and in degree from the poignancy of the sudden and premature loss of John Galsworthy.

No one is at present disposed to grudge Professor Saintsbury the title of "genius" that was bestowed upon him by Mr. J. C. Squire, bracketing him with George Moore as one of the Titans of modern literature. But that Mr. Galsworthy should have been denied even an approach to equality will seem, to some readers at least, an inept as well as an ungenerous criticism. Mr. Squire suggests that the O. M. and the Nobel Prize were by way of consolation to a meritorious writer of the second class, whose success depended on shrewd publishing sense and a personal character so attractive that it preserved him from criticism as an artist.

That George Moore was the better artist in prose, there will be few to deny. Nor is he inferior as a novelist, if pure art be our main criterion. For prose fiction he perhaps merited the Nobel Prize not less than Galsworthy, though a jury award would have been as little welcome to his artistic conscience as to the moral scruples of his earlier contemporaries. The *Confessions* and their picture of Bohemian life in Paris reveal the influence of Zola that helped to form the style—though he improved greatly upon the model—of his first period. They set also the keynote for that engaging self-revelation and frankness of expression that proved so deliciously wicked to the Victorian and Edwardian readers, but which now seem tintured—especially in the novels—with more than a little prudery. One is reminded of the penitent who was asked, when retailing his amours, whether he were confessing

or merely boasting; and of the epigram that there were three classes of philanderers: "those who kiss and tell; those who kiss and don't tell; and Mr. George Moore, who tells but never kissed". His real quality was first proved by *Esther Waters*, which for many readers will remain his finest work. The crude realism of Zola is here tempered with a sympathetic simplicity that makes a good and beautiful book. His Celtic inheritance next asserted itself in the mysticism and symbolism of *Evelyn Innes* and *The Lake*; and naturalism and fantasy are exquisitely blended in the chaste and sincere workmanship of *The Brook Kerith*. This realistic myth of the life of Jesus after the crucifixion repels some readers by the religious associations of its subject-matter and others by the heterodoxy of its treatment. But it remains for many the culmination of the author's art, as it was his own avowed preference. To many faithful admirers, however, and especially to his friends, Moore will best be remembered by the autobiographical trilogy that preserved the intimate flavour of his personality and conversation. His chief interest was in himself and his environment, and here he did his richest if not his most careful work. It was a fitting symbol of his literary life that he should have died in the midst of writing *A Communication to My Friends*.

Almost everything has been said that can be said of Professor Saintsbury—of his erudition, his omnivorous reading, his little vanities of pedantry, his amazingly catholic gusto for all good literature of whatever style or period, and almost in whatever language one could name. His tortured and hyper-parenthetical style—Saintsbury could, and probably did, split an infinitive with a paragraph if the need for qualification seemed to demand it—has been more than sufficiently castigated by literary critics and undergraduate parodists. But the object of all this abuse received it with great good humour and could cap it with an excellent story at his own expense, retorting merely that his business was that of critic and teacher, and fortifying himself perhaps with the confession of his predecessor; Hugh Blair, that it is much easier to judge others than to write well oneself. But without agreeing with Mr. Squire about the vital stylistic qualities of Saintsbury's rhetorical anfractuosités, and indeed adhering to the belief that he wrote well only on the rare occasions when he wrote simply, one can still defend his labyrinthine evolutions as being necessary for the proper disentanglement of truth from difficult places. Saintsbury neither possessed nor for his business required the happy faculty of a Lamb for revealing the truth about an author by inimitable touches of creative criticism; and he was not content with the dapper phrases

of impressionistic journalists. The bald uncritical generalization had to be hedged and trimmed, with an allowance here, an addition there, until the question was settled with almost mathematical exactitude, and the passage under discussion fixed precisely in its place in the critical scheme of things. To the present generation of students Saintsbury is doubtless an obscure writer of old fashioned text-books and ponderous works of reference. But those who have worked their way through his handbooks and prefaces, from the *Short History* to the works on criticism and prosody, forget the contrast between his delicate ear for subtleties of cadence and the tangled cacophonies of his own prose style. All that remains is a sense of indebtedness to a great critic and teacher, who never allowed the zest for literature to diminish in himself or in his pupils.

That Galsworthy was one of the rarest spirits of his generation, we do not require his friends or biographers to testify. The character of the man is enshrined in his work. His great figures, of course, are their own men and women, not puppets of their creator; his stories are objectively told, and seldom obtrusively point a moral. Yet, though neither characters nor stories are commonly fashioned from heroic material or shaped to noble ends, they bear the impress of the finely ironical and sensitive artist and moralist who made them. Unsympathetic critics complain that he is "dated"; but apart from topical allusions, which date even a Shakespeare, and the admitted fact that he has killed some of the evils at which he aimed, his passing from the fashion may indicate merely that his work gives a true record of his own period, which is now no longer ours. The *Forsyte Saga* is one of the documents of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as, for their respective environments, are the works of Addison and Fielding, or Elizabethan Dramatists, or Chaucer, and though Galsworthy may lie nearer to Addison than to Shakespeare or even Fielding, he will still do credit to his age.

It is inevitable that he should gradually have lost touch with the younger generation; but as his topical appeal recedes, the chastening influence of his biting but scrupulous criticism will the more surely make itself felt. Here was a patrician indeed, with respect for caste and tradition, but with a higher standard for his own class than for others less fortunate; acutely sensitive to the sufferings of poverty and weakness; and tortured out of an inborn reticence by a humane response to duty. No need to tell us that this was a silent man, with an enormous reserve. Even to Mr. Squire he somehow "gave the impression of having a great deal pent-up". From the early days of obscurity, through the period of the best sellers

and the heavy royalties, he remained stoically calm, taciturn, incisive, shy. In his own person he seldom spoke out; but in his works the unyielding strife for justice in the midst of conflicting loyalties wrung from him, with economy and restraint, a passionately sincere recreation of life as it is, "set down"—to use his own words—"without fear, favour, or prejudice, leaving the public to draw such poor moral as nature may afford". "The true lover of the human race", he says again, "is surely he who can put up with it in all its forms, in vice as well as in virtue, in defeat no less than victory; the true seer he who sees not only joy but sorrow, the true painter of life who blinks nothing. It may be that he is also, incidentally, its true benefactor". His closing words on Conrad provide a fitting epitaph for himself: for "if to a man's deserts is measured out the quality of his rest," Galsworthy shall sleep well.

C. L. B.