

THE PHILOSOPHER

Current Events under Review.

AS TO BARBARISM AND COMMONSENSE

One of the wise fools in Shakspeare says that there is a soul of goodness in most things evil, if only we would observingly distil it out. Take this notion that has poisoned the minds of not only the aristocrats and militarists of Germany, but of German university professors as well—the notion that “intelligent brutality” is to be cultivated as the finest of all possible human attributes, and that “the virtues of savagery” are the noblest of human virtues, and that human advancement, in the only true sense, cannot go forward unless “ruthless hardness” and “intelligent brutality” and the other “savage virtues” are cultivated, and the qualities of gentleness and humanitarianism are suppressed and regarded with contempt as being mere softness and weakness. As a matter of fact, it is true, in a large measure, that civilization does in many cases tend to soften men, and there is a need of a corrective of that tendency. But there is above all an ever present need of the sane and saving virtue of common sense which the German Emperor and those who surround him so sadly lack—otherwise they would see the absurdity of the idea that any one nation can impose its domination upon Europe by brute might and hold mankind in subjection to a military autocracy. But to return to the talk about ruthlessness and brutality as virtues that should be cultivated; the learned German professors who write ponderous books preaching this savage doctrine are simply overgrown schoolboys gloating over stories of wild adventures and of the bloodthirsty doings of pirates. Often, as was the case with Nietzsche, whose name crops up so persistently in this discussion, they are themselves physical weaklings, with a morbid worship of brute strength. For sane-minded people the vast benefits of civilization and of the gentle domestic life that civilization protects mean the development of all the best and truest possibilities of humanity, including true courage and true hardness. The poem that tells how the British soldiers in the trenches before Sebastopol sang “Annie Laurie” in an interval of quiet when the fortress guns had ceased firing for a time before the fighting was renewed with redoubled fury, says:

“Each heart recalled a different name,
But all sang Annie Laurie.”
In the same poem are these true and noble lines:
“The bravest are the tenderest,
The loving are the daring.”

When boys play at being Indians, or pirates, they are obeying a natural instinct of boyhood; but when they grow to be men, they cast off the things of the boy—if they are truly normal and fully developed, sane men.

ANGRY ABUSE OF THE AMERICAN PRESS

The failure of the schemings of the militarist ruling system of Germany to secure the approval and sympathy of the people of the United States is so complete that two new publications—the Fatherland and the Vital Issue—have been launched in New York with German money in a futile attempt to reverse the verdict against Germany which has been pronounced in the United States. These two precious sheets are now assailing the newspapers of the United States with accusations that they have been bribed by British gold to slander, insult and malign Germany and the Germans. With characteristically stupid insolence, these two German publications are even threatening the United States. “By these revilings,” says the Fatherland, “the press of this country are carrying its people along dangerous paths towards a precipice.” No doubt the Kaiser and his General Staff have it all planned to subjugate the whole of this continent after they have subjugated Europe. The Vital Issue says that “it is deplorable that American newspapers, sunk from their high level of fifty years ago, should be permitted to exercise such a fatal influence over the masses.” The German system of dragooning the press should be introduced, of course, and freedom of the press, as well as freedom of speech, crushed out under the mailed fist of despotic militarism! The course which the Fatherland and the Vital Issue are now taking can only serve to strengthen the feeling in the United States in favor of the Allies.

THE SONG THE SOLDIERS SING

Just why the favorite song of the British soldiers at the front, as of the first Canadian contingent, should be “It’s a long, long way to Tipperary,” is a question which might be discussed at great length. That sort of song has always appealed to English-speaking soldiers. The United States soldiers have made it their practice when on active service to make some current popular song their favorite. The German soldiers, on the other hand, obediently sing

what they are ordered to sing. In that, as in all else, they are machines. Our soldiers, unlike the Germans, prefer a joke that reminds them of home to a song that tells them they are heroes, and they are all the greater heroes for that. It is more truly heroic to joke in the face of death than to assume a heroic attitude. High spirits in time of peril and steady cheerfulness, which is natural, not assumed, are of the essence of true heroism. That is the British spirit, which has so often surprised the enemies of Great Britain. Victor Hugo said it was not the Iron Duke who won the battle of Waterloo, but the Iron Nation. “There spoke the generosity of a Frenchman,” an English writer has written. But there is something stronger than iron in soldiers of the British breed, stronger than the “iron and blood”

seclusion at Elba, lamented to his physician that he found it dull not to be at war. “It is the greatest and most exciting of games,” he said, “the finest of occupations.” That is the Kaiser’s point of view, too. He wants to have his name and fame as “William the Greater” eclipse the name and fame of Frederick the Great, who also protested publicly about the loftiness of his motives but who left this confession about his first war, in his memoirs: “Ambition, interest and the desire of making people talk about me carried the day and I decided for war.” To quote Macaulay:

“The selfish rapacity of the King of Prussia drove the whole world to arms. On the head of Frederick is all the blood which was shed in a war which raged during many years and in every quarter of the globe, the blood of the column of Fontenoy, the blood of the mountaineers who were slaughtered at Culloden. The evils produced by his wickedness were felt in lands where the name of Prussia was unknown; and in order that he might rob a neighbor he had sworn to protect and defend, black men fought on the coast of Coromandel, and red men scalped each other by the Great Lakes of North America.”

It will be for future historians to do full justice to the successor of Frederick, who has already so completely eclipsed Frederick in bloodshed and destruction.

THE HONOR OF BELGIUM

It will be the business of the Allies, so far as they are able, to relieve the people of Belgium, and to redress their wrongs, so far as that can be done, after the war is over. Never before has there been so much suffering concentrated in so small an area in so short a time. With 650 people to the square mile, Belgium was one of the most highly industrial of nations. It has been overrun and ravaged by the invading Germans, cities have been burned, foodstuffs seized, crops destroyed, huge contributions levied and those of its people who have not met death in the devastation of their country are, in great part, left destitute, many lacking even shelter. And all because the brave Belgian people defended their country’s treaty rights, which Germany was under solemn obligation to protect and defend. History holds no record of suffering more cruel and more undeserved, or of loftier heroism. Australia has done well to give \$500,000 to help the Belgians, and without doubt that good example will be followed. Belgium has rendered a wonderful service of self-sacrifice to the cause of freedom and human progress. Her name will stand forever glorious in the roll of nations that have kept alive the torch of liberty.

DESTRUCTION

In 1870 when the Germans rushed down on France “like the wolf on the fold”—a performance which they counted confidently upon repeating, via Belgium, this year—their progress, for all that it was so overwhelming, was at times checked. On several occasions French cavalry captured German guns, and being unfamiliar with breech-loaders, they did not know how to disable them by spiking them, and were driven off before they had succeeded in making the guns useless. The celebrated “needle” muskets with which the German soldiers were armed and breech-loading cannon were novelties introduced in that war by the Germans. In all previous wars the cannon had been loaded in the manner which had prevailed from the time gunpowder was invented and first used to propel a shot from a gun. That is to say, the charge of powder was put into the cannon at the muzzle and rammed in with a ramrod, and then the cannon ball was inserted in the same way. Breech-loading weapons and artillery were an extraordinary novelty in 1870, but what are they to the weapons and artillery and aircraft and modern warships and submarines and telephones and wireless telegraphy and the hundred and one wonders in use in the present war, which were undreamed of in 1870? An interesting parallel to the unfamiliarity of the French with the breech-loaders in 1870 is furnished by the fact that expert suggestions have been found necessary in this in which automobiles, motor trucks, motor guns and motorcycles are playing a great part, in regard to the quickest way of putting motor engines out of business. Various ways are suggested by which a person quite unfamiliar with the mechanism of a motor engine can rapidly and expertly make it useless. This is the time of smashing things in Europe on a scale monstrously greater than that of any previous smashings by men of the works of man. As for smashed motor engines if they cannot be repaired, they can at any rate be replaced. But how about cathedrals and other monuments that are legacies from past ages, that have been smashed by the Germans?

The Call

By Hugh McKay, M.D., C.M., Winnipeg.

Hark! on my listening ear
Outborne upon the night wind’s mystic
breath
There falls a cry!
Resounding o’er the endless deep
From Britain’s distant shore,
A call to arms!
A call, that reaching to the very ends
of earth
Grows loud and ever louder yet:
A call, that rugged, rocky coast
And promontory gray and grim out-
standing,
Nor endless plains that stretch to where
The sky is lost in earth’s embrace,
Nor mountain peaks that rear their
serried heads,
Snow-clad and robed in white above
the clouds,
Nor all the weary waste of waters,
Nor time, nor place, nor distance
Weakens nor grows less.
A call to arms! The clarion call of
duty!
A call to draw the sword in Freedom’s
cause.
And fight for Empire, Home and
Native Land.
And ever the answer comes
From Britons the wide world o’er.
Oh! gray haired stately mother,
Proud mistress of the sea,
My heart responsive beats
In unison with thee!

of German vauntings. All the machinery of modern warfare cannot turn them into machines, nor has that ever been attempted by a mechanical discipline and the methods used on the German soldiers. So they have a spirit which cannot be broken like a machine—a spirit which makes fun of every danger and hardship and which is terrible only to its enemies, not to women and children. The language of the songs the German soldiers sing is lofty, but these songs will be infamous through future ages because of the things done by the armies singing them.

FREDERICK THE GREAT OUTDONE

Persistently and in endlessly varied forms the falsehood that the German Emperor strove for peace and yearned for peace and had no desire for war, is still being put forward by the various German agencies for the dissemination of falsehood, especially by the highly organized system operated from the office of the German Ambassador at Washington. That system is laboring strenuously, but in vain, to secure a reversal of the verdict of public opinion in the United States, which is against Germany. At St. Helena Napoleon was never tired of protesting that peace had always been his supreme desire and the constant object of his unflinching and consistent efforts. The facts were against him, however, as they are against his would-be imitator. In the negotiations after the battle of Leipsic Napoleon said to Count Mettenich that what he called his “honor” came before peace, and that the lives of a million men meant nothing to him. They mean no more to the Kaiser. A hundred years ago this month Napoleon, then in