

The Catholic Record

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LONDON, SATURDAY, MARCH 7, 1925

DEMOCRACY

We have been reading a great deal recently about democracy. Indeed in one way or another the subject is almost continuously thrust on the attention of all who read the newspapers. One of the most amazing items of news bearing on the theory and practice of democracy we read only a few days since. Here it is:

Kansas City, Mo., Feb. 25.—The city manager plan of government will be inaugurated in this city next year under the new city charter adopted at the polls yesterday. The charter carried by a vote of nearly 4 to 1. Less than one-third of the registered voters cast ballots.

Now what does this mean? It means that in democratic America a city of over a quarter of a million people, less than ten per cent. of whom are foreign born, has scrapped and discarded democratic government. The utter apathy of over two-thirds of the voters seems something incredible. Only about seven per cent. of those entitled to vote cared enough about the inalienable rights of a sovereign and free people to mark their ballots against the surrender of their democratic rights and privileges.

This assuredly is something of deep—if not dire—significance. And its significance is not lessened but greatly enhanced by the fact that this item of news was tucked away in an obscure corner of the paper, and, if noticed at all, read with supreme indifference by people supposed to be quite passionately attached to government of the people, by the people, for the people.

Many American cities have scrapped democratic government and taken on government by commission. In Ireland the Free State Government felt constrained to abolish the elected city corporations and hand the municipal government over to appointed administrators. This both in Dublin and Cork resulted, we are told, in very much more satisfactory administration of civic affairs. To judge by the way he speaks of them the average man has little respect for politicians whether municipal or provincial or federal. And the decay of democracy on this continent is sufficiently indicated by the habitual abstention from the polls of half the people.

There is evidently something wrong with democracy. And as this is a matter that concerns each and every one of us, that touches on the civic right and the civic duty of every individual, it is worth while giving it some attention and study. Kansas City, Mo., is a concrete and arresting proof that break-down of democracy in Europe is not a matter altogether foreign to our interest.

Richard Washburn Child, for three years American Ambassador to Italy, is now "travelling about from country to country in an attempt to find out how democracy was succeeding (in Europe) or why it was failing." It will readily be conceded that his former official position gives him exceptional opportunities for such investigation. The results he gives us in a series of intensely interesting and illuminating articles in the Saturday Evening Post.

The menace of socialism or communism he finds everywhere. Between the two he distinguishes merely a difference of method; their ultimate aim is identical. "What will happen tomorrow—what next year—what in a decade?" That is the question that confronts European statesmen and thinkers, as well as the rank and file of the people in every European country.

"It is so vital that it marks with its brand this whole era of European politics. The surface of that pool shimmers with details of political plays and policies, but any net dragging beneath the surface

always brings up The Question, and it always clamours for an answer." What gives vitality to the menace of communism is loss of faith in democracy. People had looked forward to democracy as the panacea that would cure all the ills that flesh is heir to. They have been disillusioned. The first duty of a government is to govern. So Italy turns joyously to her strong man Mussolini, Spain to Primo de Rivera—and Kansas City, Mo., to a city manager.

"We Americans," writes Mr. Child, "may well take this question by the forelock. Democracy in the sense of parliamentary government has had no conspicuous success. If it has stood up in America and Great Britain it occupies already a doubtful position in France. It writes in some agony in Germany. In 1916 I saw it tottering in the Duma of Russia. I was in Italy when it fell flat. I have just looked over the remains of its feeble collapse in Spain. Nor does it grow ill only in its old age." And he instances, in proof, China and Turkey. "This is the great danger of democracy—its disillusionment—the difference between the noble, gold-lettered label and the true contents. . . . In the year 1925 Europe faces this disillusionment."

The ex-Ambassador's concluding summary of one of his articles is this:

"I have sought the opinions of the wisest men I could find in many countries. It is their combined opinion that there are three thoughts of change in the minds of the peoples of Europe:

"The first is socialism or communism.

"The second is the temporary answer of Italy and Spain, reflected also in a growing hunger in France and Germany for strong personal leadership—the turn toward dictatorship.

"The third is the reform of democracy itself."

In a later article he tells us that "today there is a tremendous tide of cynicism about democracy." And this cynical ridicule which he finds widespread in Europe is not directed at democracy as idealists conceive it; but at democracy as it works out in practice. He quotes an old English editor who is also a member of Parliament:

"There can be no doubt that even our own parliamentary government, although better than continental forms, no longer satisfies. Candor requires us to admit that its quality and its practices have degenerated. This is especially true since the War, and people feel it. In our administrative government—the executive—there is still unshaken faith. From our exchequer down we have skill, experience, training. That administrative system, developed constantly over hundreds of years, is the strength of Great Britain. But the parliamentary system is no longer one of quality. Representatives have become unlike the free, expressive, fit men of half a century ago. Today they are more like lay figures moved about. They are disciplined by party whips. . . . One of the consequences of this deterioration is the proposal or the vague hunger for plans which would remove some of the functions from the Commons and establish semilegislative bodies outside—for instance, an industrial legislature made up of capital and labor interests creating laws for their own worlds not unlike the methods used by trade guilds in China. . . . If so, we are doomed to disorganization, to the lack of unity which caught and swallowed most of the Orientals centuries ago."

In France, discussing the proposed amnesty to Caillaux, one heard this: "He is coming to Paris. At least he will be the power behind the scenes. Herriot may go. Briand may come. But France has forgotten the man exiled for communicating with the enemy. Do you believe France would have forgiven a weak man? Poof! But France figures Caillaux because she needs a strong man, because she hungers for wisdom and strength even when it may operate behind the scenes. We would make of Caillaux a skilled stage manager of France's finance. The ministry and the Chamber? Ah, they are marionettes, squeaking and disjointed. France wishes a hand strong enough to make them dance in step to some national harmony."

A big industrialist in Germany says: "There is a growing desire in all hearts for unity. Even oppressive

unity is better than the futile clamor of little and big groups who never know their own mind unless it is to shake the tree of democracy so that the fruit will fall into their baskets. Do you believe that the mass has the passion to be possessed of power to govern? You are mistaken. The passion of humanity is to be well governed. Democracy must prove itself capable of doing this or it will fail here just as it has broken down in the Latin countries. . . . Any people would turn to a dictator or to a monarchy with a certain sadness. But always there comes first in the decisions of mankind—necessity!"

"When democracy," writes this student of European politics, "has lost all its authority to govern, people will take the convenience offered. They may take a monarch if they are assured that he and his successors will not become the instruments of tyranny. They would take communism if their necessity is great enough and if the passion of the mass swept it back to that great illusion. Much more readily will they go seeking a dictator.

"After all, the power of a dictator who has the will of the people behind him is not far removed from the power of a prime minister who happens to have an overwhelming majority. Both can dictate to a parliament. At this moment of writing it is perhaps true that Baldwin, with his great Conservative majority in the House of Commons, answerable to his will in the last analysis of party practice, has literally more power than Mussolini who is now under attack.

If difference there be, it is in the fact that Mussolini's enemies are able to assert that he maintains his power by force of the Fascisti militia rather than by the will of the people, as his friends claim. The truth remains that both men have given great powers because one people by election and another by spontaneous, direct action, approved at the time by the great majority, have had the instinct for strong administrative government and have followed that instinct."

Democracy with the many is a mere catchword connoting every thing desirable in the way of government of a free people. With some it is a fetish. With few it is the subject of thought and study. If we do not, each and all, do some thinking about it then democratic institutions in Canada, already in none too good repute, will follow those of other countries in the way of decadence.

THE FRENCH PREMIER

The multiplicity of parties in France and other countries of Europe has reduced democratic government to something absurdly like opera bouffe. The combination of parties or groups necessary to make up a majority is called the "bloc" and the bloc system gives to each handful composing it power disproportionate to its numbers or importance—the power to withdraw and overturn the ministry. Overturning ministries is the chief work of the French chamber of deputies.

Prime Minister Herriot, pressed though he was by grave responsibilities national and international, was compelled to play up to the extreme anti-clericals. He had to redeem his pledge, made to secure their support at the elections, to abolish the embassy to the Vatican. In the course of keeping his promise to the ear of his bitterly anti-clerical supporters he was forced to break it to their hope. Alsace and Lorraine are staunchly Catholic and their relations to the Holy See are governed by a concordat. The sturdy Catholics of the redeemed provinces, angered by the threat of laicising their schools—which means making them positively Godless—showed that they were not to be trifled with, tricked and deceived with impunity. They had been solemnly promised in the name of France that their educational and religious rights would be scrupulously respected.

So Mr. Herriot, Prime Minister of France, was reduced to the sorry compromise of promising that he would keep a representative at the Vatican for Alsace-Lorraine. This absurd inconsistency pleased nobody. It did not satisfy the Opposition reinforced by the radical ex-Premier Briand with forty Left followers and it enraged the anti-clericals, who were prepared to vote down the substitute representation. But when they found that

the Opposition bloc were going to vote against Herriot's half-way measure they were compelled to swallow their disappointment and their principles and support Herriot, no doubt damning the equivocation of the Premier who lied like truth. Herriot saved his bacon at the price of dignity and self-respect. A sorry spectacle and one that helps to explain why the wobbling 'democracy' of France is so heartily despised by Frenchmen.

But poor Herriot is not yet out of the woods. Even an anticlerical will admit that it takes two to make a bargain; emphatically is this true of a diplomatic bargain. The Holy See may not receive Herriot's compromise chargé d'affaires for Alsace Lorraine, who—no matter what he is called—must necessarily represent the French Government. So Mr. Herriot has been obliged to send M. Muzie, one of his followers, and an ardent Catholic strange to say, to Rome to see if by way of the Vatican back-stairs he may find some way out of the perplexing, undignified and—still worse—ridiculous position into which France and her Prime Minister have floundered.

It is to laugh.

In the past we confess we were never able to understand the loud protests and the supine inaction of French Catholics under anticlerical persecution. Now all that is changed. The Catholics of France are not only protesting against anticlerical threats—they have barely gone beyond threats as yet—but actively organizing for vigorous assertion and defence of their full civic rights as citizens of France.

In all parts of the country great public meetings of four thousand, five thousand, ten thousand, twenty thousand and more, have been and are still being held, and the spirit is admirable. Hundreds of thousands are enrolling themselves in the Catholic Federation with the heroic General de Castelnau at their head. They are evidently earnest, enthusiastic and determined. In the Great War they were ready to die for France, countless numbers of them actually did lay down their lives; now their high resolve is that France will have peace with justice. They saved France from the foreign enemy; they will not permit a persecuting internal faction to destroy the liberties they defended so heroically.

All honor to the fighting Catholics of France; may they win another and no less important victory.

TAKE THE CATHOLIC POINT OF VIEW

By THE OBSERVER

The Western Catholic says we must keep our Catholic habits; that when we stop our Catholic paper, the family fails to get a spiritual uplift. It is true; and it is a truth which is being gradually lost sight of. In proportion to their means, Catholics today do not support the Catholic press as faithfully as the Catholics of some years ago used to do. The latter were poor, compared with the Catholics of the present day; but their appreciation of the propriety and the necessity of supporting Catholic undertakings was proportionately much greater.

The Catholic of a former time was less critical of the Catholic paper. Now, the Catholic paper is too often placed in an unfair comparison with the huge papers that are kept on foot for business purposes or for political purposes, and because the former do not feel able, and have not the means, to furnish all the matters of passing interest which are found in the daily press, some Catholics are disposed to find fault with them and say they are no good. The Catholic paper has a special mission, and it performs it faithfully and always as perfectly as the Catholic people make possible for it to do.

Catholic papers are very seldom well off for money; they are often the personal venture of a few men of very moderate means. Catholic affairs in this young country in which there are so many matters to be looked after, seldom permit of the employment of much money by Catholic ecclesiastics in the publishing of Catholic papers. The only hope for the survival of a Catholic paper is, that it may receive sympathetic support from the Catholic laity.

That support is too generally withheld, and on trivial and unreasonable grounds. To the old-fashioned Catholic, to whose support it is due that we have any

Catholic press in this country at all, the mere fact that a paper is striving week after week to do something for the Church they love, is, in itself, enough to make him overlook any little faults or imperfections which his sympathy tells him are due to circumstances which are beyond the control of the editors or publishers, and which he hopes to see amended, as they usually are amended, when the paper gets something like the support to which its mission entitles it.

Catholic papers are eager to do something of value for their readers; and poor as they often are, and hardly knowing whether they can keep going for another year or not, they do; everyone of them does; a real, substantial and beneficial work for the Catholic people. In that work, one of the main objects is, to keep before the Catholic people the Catholic point of view. Sometimes an individual may wonder why Catholic papers give so much time to current events. It is because in commenting on current events there is an excellent chance to indicate the Catholic point of view. The affairs of men are complicated; and that complexity is heightened by the fact that those affairs are managed largely by persons who have no knowledge of the Catholic point of view.

What exactly do we mean by the Catholic point of view? Why should Catholics have a special point of view? Wherein does it differ from other points of view? The Catholic point of view is, that all the human race are in this world for a purpose fixed by Almighty God and which is as unchangeable as God Himself; and that is, to know, love and serve God here on earth and afterwards to see and enjoy Him forever in Heaven. The world and all that happens in it are to be regarded by the Catholic from that point of view; and if he allows himself to be drawn off to other, and more worldly points of view, he is not trying to see the world, its events and its people, as they appear in the eyes of God, which it is the whole aim and object of Catholic education to enable him to do.

We say the whole aim and end of Catholic education and by that we mean all Catholic education by whatever means, or through whatever medium it may be imparted. Only the man who takes right views and sees the world as it is, and judges the worth, or the worthlessness, of human actions by God's eternal tests, is educated; and if he is so trained, he is educated in the highest and most essential way, no matter what his accomplishments may be; no matter whether he has any or not.

Now, the purpose of the Catholic press is, to keep before men's minds, and to assert without ceasing, this Catholic point of view. Why? Because ten thousand things work together to divert the mind of the Catholic from that changeless test and touch-stone of Catholic theology and doctrine. It is a curious error of the day, and it has prevailed in all ages amongst erring men, to imagine that there are two worlds, as it were in one, here below; in one of which men live for certain purposes; for business or for politics, or for amusement; whilst in the other they attend more or less indifferently to the business of another existence which each man thinks is not going to be of close personal interest to him until he is eighty or ninety years old. And, it is a favorite delusion in the world that these two spheres have very little to do with each other; and in fact that that sphere which has to do with religion is very well attended to on Sunday; while the other sphere claims the other six days of the week.

The Catholic point of view is, that this world is all one; and that though there are spheres in life in which religion does not enter with forms and ceremonies, there is no sphere nor walk of life in which God and His laws can be dispensed with for one moment. This is the line of cleavage between the Catholic point of view and the world's point of view; and it is of supreme concern to Catholics that they should not be drawn away from the Catholic point of view; though unfortunately they often are, and in great numbers. It is sometimes said, for instance, that the ordinary rules of morality do not apply in all their strictness in the case of political business; and it is, we fear, too often imagined that in the office and in the shop, the law of God that

everyone should have his own, is not too well regarded by individual Catholics.

The attitude of the world in general towards Almighty God, is, "Hands Off;" leave us alone, we shall attend to your affairs on Sunday, (if it is a fine day). This is a week day, and we are out to make money. Let us alone. And are Catholics likely to be affected by that easy-going paganism? Alas, yes, they are; many of them are; and they sometimes want to argue with priests and other Catholic teachers about it. The Catholic press would be more popular if it could flatter the spirit of the world as secular papers do; could fill its columns with encouragement for every foolish glorification of poor and fallen human nature. But the Catholic press has to spend much time in warnings, and warnings are not popular nowadays; for men think well of themselves; and are little disposed to thank anyone for warning them of dangers to which they think, in their vanity, they are safely superior.

Again, the Catholic press must, in the ordinary doing of its duty, often tell Catholics that they are taking a non-Catholic point of view, and are forgetting their Catholicism; and who likes to be talked to in that way? But, despite all discouragements, the Catholic press must go on. It is a test of the soundness of a man's Catholicism, whether he is willing to support it or not. As we said a moment ago, there are Catholics, and there were once more of them than there are now, who realize the meaning and the importance of the maintenance by a Catholic press of the Catholic point of view. The spirit of the world has got in its deadly work amongst Catholics, sad to say; and a Catholic population which is able to support a great and powerful Catholic press in Canada is content, in its indifference, with a few papers which have no easy time to keep up their work.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

IN THE many disquisitions in the daily press on the title "Earl of Oxford," assumed by Mr. Asquith on his elevation to the peerage, we have not noted any reference to the De Vere family of Curragh Chase, Adare, of which the late Aubrey De Vere, poet and philosopher, was the most eminent representative. The ancient Earls of Oxford were De Veres, and the several claimants, or pseudo-claimants to the title which Mr. Asquith's assumption of it have called forth, base their claims upon descent from that family.

It is recalled that in 1912 the Duke of Atholl lodged a claim to the Earldom with the Committee on Privileges of the House of Lords, his contention being that it should have passed to the daughters of the 14th Earl of the De Vere creation of 1142, and remained in abeyance among their descendants. The Duke of Atholl claimed to be the lineal descendant and senior co-heir of John Neville, a son of Lady Latimer, presumably one of the daughters of the 14th Earl referred to. It is interesting to note that on that occasion the late Mr. Raymond Asquith, son of the new Earl, appeared with the Attorney-General for the Crown, in resisting Atholl's claim. The Committee in the event decided against the claim.

ON THE present occasion several other dormant claims have been resurrected against Mr. Asquith's assumption of the title, but none have been taken seriously. The consensus of opinion in well-informed quarters is, on the contrary, that no valid reasons exist why Mr. Asquith should not revive the title. So astute a lawyer as the ex-Premier, who had probably studied the position when the Atholl claim was put forward, would scarcely have selected a title objection to which was likely to be sustained.

THE IRISH De Vere family traces its descent from Aubrey Vere, second son of the sixteenth Earl of Oxford (born 1555). This Aubrey Vere's daughter, Jane, married Henry Hunt of Gosfield, Essex, and from their union was descended Sir Vere Hunt of Curragh, Limerick, grandfather of the recently deceased poet. (The last Earl of Oxford, it should be noted, whose portrait hangs in the library at Curragh Chase, was grandson of the Aubrey Vere above mentioned.)

SOME CONFUSION is apt to arise over the name Aubrey, occurring as

it does in almost every generation of the family. Mr. (afterwards Sir) Aubrey Hunt, son of Sir Vere Hunt, and father of the more distinguished Aubrey, was himself a poet—the author of some sonnets highly praised by Wordsworth, and of the fine dramatic poem, "Mary Tudor." On his accession to the baronetcy in 1831, he assumed by Royal license the surname of de Vere in place of Hunt. Hence his son, Aubrey Thomas Hunt, became the Aubrey de Vere whose poetry and prose essays are so well known on both sides of the Atlantic. The poetic gift seems to be a family heritage since Aubrey's elder brother, Sir Stephen, the latest baronet, is also a poet of distinction.

Of the Aubrey de Vere all that need be said here is that he ranks among the greater poets of the Victorian era. The friend of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Tennyson, and the disciple of John Henry Newman at Oxford, he followed that great leader into the Catholic Church, and thenceforth, with all the ardor of his nature, devoted his talents to the service of the Great Cause. When asked once by Edmund Gosse, who, among all the great souls he had known had impressed him most, he said instantly, "Wordsworth and Newman." And, he added, "they are the two for whom my love has been most like idolatry." Of the latter especially, how many might say the same!

We began with a reference to the Earldom of Oxford. The title has been extinct so long that, until its revival by Right Hon. Mr. Asquith, it had seemed to have passed into the limbo of forgotten things. The mere fact of its revival now has brought forward claimants some, perhaps, with a title to consideration, but for the most part far-fetched in the extreme. Judging by the shadowy pleas put forward in the press, the de Veres of Curragh Chase, who, apparently, have kept modestly in the background, would seem to be more in the direct line than any of them. As it is the distinguished ex-Premier becomes Earl of Oxford, bringing lustre to the title rather than drawing lustre from it.

SOME MONTHS ago some space was given in these columns to a "shelf of old books," of special Catholic interest, offered for sale by leading London antiquarian booksellers. They were commented upon then as illustrating the value placed by connoisseurs upon these products of the early presses, so many of them operated by Catholics and devoted to the propagation of Truth. The subject seems of sufficient interest to justify return to it, more particularly since the printing press has in subsequent ages been prostituted to other and baser uses.

IN A more recent catalogue we note another copy of the first edition of "The Imitation of Christ" described as "one of the most famous books in the world" as it certainly is the book which, after the Bible itself, has brought solace and strength to more hearts than perhaps any other book ever printed. This "first edition" consists of 76 numbered leaves in Gothic type, initials rubricated throughout, from the press of Gunther Zainer, 1471. It is, as a specimen facsimile page shows, a beautiful specimen of typography as all the productions of those early presses were. This one is priced at £600.

ANOTHER INTERESTING volume is Alexander Barclay's "Ship of Fools," bearing date 1570. The full title is "The Ship of Fools, wherein is showed the Folly of all States, with divers other Workes adjoined unto the same, very profitable and fruitful for all men. Translated out of Latin into Englyshe." The translator, Alexander Barclay, was a Scots priest, who died in 1562. The work was first published in 1509. The design of this remarkably curious work was to ridicule the prevailing follies and vices of every rank and profession under the allegory of a ship freighted with fools, and in his metrical translation Barclay has given a variety of characters, drawn exclusively from his own countrymen, and added his advice to the various "fools," which possesses at least the merits of good sense and sound