

# By the Way

THOSE who have watched the late elections in the Old Country where so-called Labor has deposed Conservative government and now takes charge, should be reminded of history," says a correspondent to the Vancouver "Sun." he then proceeds to outline some alleged history of the French Revolution of the 18th century and the Russian and Hungarian revolutions of our day. His outline (?) is based on political pamphleteering, masquerading as history, whose author, I should judge to be a near relation of Mrs. Webster. I quote the conclusion of his letter. Says he:—

One modern writer puts the sequence of events thus:

1. The installation of a moderate socialist government, in order to pave the way for a more violent party, is an invariable move in the game of the world revolutionaries.
2. That these moderate socialists, whether they are conscious agents or unconscious tools, are always swept away by the tide of revolution.
3. That a period of anarchy necessarily follows.
4. That anarchy can only end in military despotism.
5. That the violence of revolution meets with correspondingly violent reaction.

The question is, has the "Crack of Doom" come to Old England?

F. M. McLEOD.

Shortly after reading the letter I ran into a Socialist who asserted his belief that the capitalists had picked out Ramsay MacDonald twenty years ago to seduce a Labor party into saving capitalism. I should think a less romantic explanation than either of these would serve most people to account for "moderate" parties when there are obvious and adequate causes close to hand. Most people are moderate, at least, most all of the time, making up that vast majority between Right and Left extremists. In times of social stress they may lean to Left or Right and even accept other leadership temporarily. But—Why is a moderate? Perhaps a matter of temperament and age, education and social affiliation; some material interest makes timid and old habits and loyalties maintain control! Moreover, the moderates, if necessary, are quite capable of forming their own parties and vulgarly practical programs, and of furnishing their own leadership without assistance from without.

As to the letter as a whole, it offered a pretty exhibition of blind partisan malice, deliberately distorting history, for F. M. McLeod leaves out all mention of the Monarchy, the courtiers and the feudal landed aristocrats and wealthy privileged interests and their contributions during centuries to the violence of the French and Russian revolutions. But what my article chiefly concerns itself with, he, in his prognostication of future political development in Great Britain appears to have made no attempt to examine the British case, as a special case in point, on its own merits, for whatever there may be in it that might determine a different procedure of change to the other cases he has in mind. Incidentally in regard to "moves in the game" of politics, seeing that both the letter writer and my Socialist are Scots, they might reflect with Burns how "the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley," even in the small affairs of life where controls are more easily established than over political alignments in a struggle of national scope in times of revolutionary change.

I propose chiefly by extracts from the article in the "Encyclopedia Britannica" on the history of France, to fill in the gap left by F. M. McLeod in respect to the part played by the privileged classes of France leading up to the revolution. In order to throw light on the British case of today, by way of contrast to the political development of pre-revolutionary France I shall also present some particulars of contemporary political development in England.

During the thirteenth century there sprang up over most of Europe systems of representative government, i.e., government by groups composed of the burgesses of the towns, the small gentry and lesser clergy, the feudal barons and higher ecclesiastics, respectively, with the monarch as supreme authority. By the sixteenth century, however, all

countries, except England, which continued to develop the representative system, though not without struggle with the monarchy, had gone back again to the system of absolute monarchy. No doubt the war-ridden and disturbed state of continental Europe gave occasion for monarchical dictatorships, while the more peaceful conditions of English social life allowed for the development of representative institutions.

But dealing with particulars, to start with the reign of Louis XIII. (1601-1642) will be early enough to illustrate the character of the institutional life under which successive generations of French people grew up, and to view the revolutionary forces in the making. (All matter quoted is from the Encyclopedia Britannica unless otherwise attributed.) Cardinal Richelieu was minister of affairs under this absolute monarch to the end of the reign. Richelieu asserted and enforced the principle "that no one might meddle in political affairs, neither Parliament nor States-General, though he occasionally took council with these assemblies of notables; still less had the public any right to judge of the actions of government. Even provincial and municipal liberties were restricted \* \* \* thus, depriving the people of the habit of criticising governmental action, he taught them a fatal acquiescence in uncontrolled and undisputed authority."

The succeeding monarch, Louis XIV. (1642-1715), ascended the throne, with his mother as regent until 1651, and had as his minister Cardinal Mazarin. That minister carried on the traditional policy of his predecessor in office until his death in 1661, when Louis himself took full charge. "Louis ruled that all matters of public business must be referred to himself \* \* \* and considered he need render no account of his duties to any one but his Maker. He, as God's vice-regent, would not take the law from his people. As for his rights, Louis solemnly affirmed these as plenary and unlimited. Representative of God upon earth, heir to the sovereignty of the Roman emperors, a universal Suzerain and master over the goods and lives of his vassals, he could conceive of no other bounds to his authority than his own interests or his obligations to God. \* \* \* He therefore had but two aims: to increase his power at home and to enlarge his kingdom abroad." France became, by the year 1660 the dominant power in Europe, though the closing years of the reign found the tide running strongly against her. It was this Louis XIV. who said in answer to the question, What is the State? The State! I am the State!

Let us turn for a moment to contemporary England, I cite two instruments, the "Petition of Rights" of 1628 and the "Bill of Rights" of 1688, whose affirmations serve to throw light on the development of representative political institutions in that country at the expense of the pretensions to monarchical absolutism of the English kings. The language also in which the instruments are expressed, will in a measure reveal the attitude of mind and the ideas as to the relations of the individual and the State prevalent in England at the time and indicate what political and legal rights were being gained and traditions created for future generations to inherit. It will be noticed the date of one of the instruments precedes the French monarch's reign by fourteen years, and the other by some twenty-seven years, when France was at the height of its power, precedes the end of his reign. Between those dates, 1628 and 1688, one English king, Charles, was defeated in civil war, tried for treason, and beheaded; and another, James II., driven (a bloodless revolution) from the country. Both these kings lost the throne contesting the constitutional powers of parliament. In 1628, prior to the breaking out of open war, parliament forced Charles I to agree to what was called the Petition of Right which enacted:

- (1) That no freeman be required to give any gift, loan, or tax without common consent by Act of Parliament;
- (2) That no freeman be imprisoned or detained contrary to the law of the land;
- (3) That soldiers or mariners be

not billeted in private houses; (4) That commissions to punish soldiers and sailors by martial law be revoked and no more issued.

In 1688, after James the Second had escaped out of the country, William of Orange and Mary were tendered the throne on the terms of a statement which they accepted as a rule of government. The statement was embodied in an Act of Parliament called the Bill of Rights. Its chief clauses were:

- (1) The pretended power of suspending or dispensing with the laws assumed of late is illegal.
- (2) The late Court of Ecclesiastical Commission and other such courts are illegal.
- (3) Levying money by pretense of prerogative, without grant of Parliament is illegal.
- (5) Subjects have a right to petition the King.
- (6) Parliaments ought to be held frequently.

Since that date no man has been able to pretend that the kings of England reign by any other than a parliamentary title, or that parliament is not the supreme authority in the government of the country." So says the text book I quoted from in respect of those Bills of Rights. The fact that this text book "is published for the use of lower forms" in the public schools of Great Britain, to be read at the formative age of youth, will have some significance for those who are willing to study the British case of social change on its own merits and in the light of its own political history.

The reign in France of Louis XIV ended in 1715. Says the Britannica: Disease and famine; crushing imposts and extortions; official debasement of the currency; bankruptcy; state prisons; religious and political inquisition; suppression of all institutions for the safe-guarding of rights; tyranny by the intendants; royal, feudal and clerical oppression burdening every faculty and every necessity of life; monstrous and incurable luxury; the horrible drama of poison; the two-fold adultery of Madame de Montespan; and the narrow bigotry of Madame de Maintenon (his unofficial wife after the death of the queen.)—all occurred to make the end of the reign a sad contrast to the splendor of its beginning."

The degeneration of France continued under the policies of his son, Louis XV, whose errors "laid the foundations of the Prussian and the British empires. By three battles, victories for enemies of France—Rossbach in Germany, 1757; Plassey in India, 1757; and Quebec in Canada, 1759 (owing to the recall of Duplex, who was not bringing in large enough dividends to the Company of the Indies, and to the abandonment of Montcalm, who could not interest anyone in a few acres of snow), the expansion of Prussia was assured and the British were relieved of French rivalry in the expansion of their empire in India and on the North American continent." And so on and on, from bad to worse till of all her old allies France had but one (Sweden) left. "Instead of being as formerly the centre of great affairs, the Cabinet of Versailles lost all its credit, and only exhibited before the eyes of contemptuous Europe France's extreme state of decay."

It was this state of France that Louis XVI took over, a reign which he shared with the revolution. Who were the schemers, who's the plot? Rather was it not out of the soil of seventeenth and eighteenth century social conditions, unintended by any group of men, that the revolutionary ideas of eighteenth century France arose, of which the central idea was "that natural rights are superior to all political arrangements."

Voltaire, Montesquieu the Encyclopaedists, the Physiocrats and—Rousseau, proclaiming the theory of the social contract and the sovereignty of the people. "But the philosophers only helped to precipitate a movement they had not created. The terrible prevalence of poverty and want; the successive famines; the mistakes of government; the scandals of the Parc aux Cerfs; and the Parlement playing the Roman senate; all these causes added together and multiplied, assisted in setting a general fermentation to work." Nevertheless, "the preaching of all this general philosophy, not only in France, but throughout the whole of Europe, would have