

The Catholic Record

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LONDON, SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 1918

THE BRACING AIR OF FREE CRITICISM

Compared with the press of England or with the press of the United States, Canadian newspapers are painfully lacking in courage and independence. In matters connected with the War the condition is nauseating. The argument most apt and ample for common use is the example. The cable is constantly giving us evidence of the courage and fidelity to conviction of English journalists which, despite the flabby optimism and spurious "loyalty" of our own press, can not be altogether concealed from the Canadian reader of average intelligence.

In the States five or six weeks ago Senator Chamberlain in a public address said:

"The military establishment of America has fallen down. There is no use to be optimistic about a thing that does not exist. It has almost stopped functioning. Why? Because of inefficiency in every bureau and department."

This was a scathingly severe indictment of the Secretary of War and his Department. Whereupon President Wilson came to his defence in these vigorous and unequivocal words:

"The War department has performed a task of unparalleled magnitude and difficulty with extraordinary promptness and efficiency. My association and constant conference with the secretary of war have taught me to regard him as one of the ablest public officials I have ever known."

With us in similar circumstances that would end the matter unless party politics could be served by partisan attack and defence. American journalists are made of sterner stuff. Quite regardless of party affiliations the whole matter was subjected to free and honest criticism. Before us are many articles of the discussion which followed; we give a few excerpts:

"Since this country undertook to conquer the strongest military Power in the world the army has been raised from 200,000 to more than 1,500,000. This rapid mobilization of man power is an achievement of unquestioned merit. But it represents only a fraction of the task, which in all other respects has been marked by sloth, incompetence and downright neglect."

The investigations of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs brought out the facts; American journalists, in refreshing contrast with our own, dealt faithfully with the situation thus made known.

For instance; "The American army does not possess today enough field artillery to make a showing on any sector of any European battlefield; not even enough to supply the home training camps, where thousands of recruits have been drilling with dummy guns. "Every one knows the 'extraordinary promptness and efficiency' in procuring machine guns. The American Lewis gun, which has been used by the number of 70,000 by the Allies, and had stood the test of battle for three years, was repeatedly rejected. A large appropriation for machine guns was made by congress in August, 1916, but the first real action taken was the holding of tests last May—six weeks after we entered the war; whereupon a gun existing only on paper was adopted, and deliveries of it will begin next April. Meanwhile, the machine gun troops in the training camps have studied drawings or drilled with dummy guns."

For the purpose of illustration that will suffice. Of course in the days of party government and party press we could parallel this vigorous journalistic plain speaking, but it is precisely in the fact that Democratic

journalists and Democratic public men fearlessly criticised a Democratic administration that we find the evidence of that honesty and courage which is so desirable and necessary if the press is to fulfil its important function in self-governing countries.

The result has been that in the bracing air of free criticism the "sloth, incompetence and downright neglect" which had characterized the War administration have in great measure disappeared; and though time has been lost beyond recall, at least obstacles to the free play of American energy and efficiency have been removed, and the need of intelligent coordination of direction made manifest.

During all this pitiless exposure of the War conditions in the United States Canadian readers of Canadian papers were not only not kept informed, but were positively misled in accordance with that species of optimism which impels the ostrich to bury its head in the sand when danger is imminent. H. G. Wells has written: "There is far franker criticism of militarism in Germany than there is of reactionary Toryism in this country and it is more free to speak its mind." And yet what strikes the Canadian reading English newspapers is their frank and free criticism compared with our monotonous chant of praise of everything that is British and our equally monotonous shriek of condemnation of everything German. The quotation from H. G. Wells in the Daily Mail is a case in point. Such a sentence, such an article as the one from which it is taken (reproduced in THE RECORD, Feb. 2nd) could find no place in the ordinary Canadian newspaper.

Time does not stale the intense interest felt in the progress of the War. Laying aside then, the childish camouflage with which the real War news is disguised let us in a few plain words sum up one salient feature of the situation as it now stands. In the first place we must realize that our whole War strategy has utterly broken down. That strategy is easy to understand. It consisted in enclosing the Central Powers in an iron ring, the military and economic pressure of which would eventually cause them to collapse. The overrunning of Serbia made the first serious breach of this investment and enabled the Central Empires to hold their Balkan allies—Bulgaria and Turkey. The conquest of Roumania widened the breach and opened up important sources of supplies.

The collapse and final withdrawal of Russia from the War breaks the iron ring clean in two; half of it is irretrievably gone, the other half no longer a menace to the enemy but a wall of defence against Teutonic aggression. No longer does economic pressure reinforce our military effort. Roumania and the Ukraine will furnish the people of Central Europe with ample food supplies. The Military Expert of the N. Y. Times says:

"The Ukraine country is the Russian bread basket. Lying along the Black Sea, it is one of the most fertile grain countries in the world, and produces one-third of the entire Russian production of grain of all kinds. . . ."

"There have been no means by which the surplus grain could be distributed through the Russian Empire. But there is a means by which it can reach Germany. If there is no grain in the Ukraine, Germany, of course, cannot profit until the next harvest. But certainly, as matters stand now, if Germany can hold out until the next harvest—and she certainly can, as far as we know—she will not suffer again for food while the War lasts."

That is the tremendous significance of the break-down of the Allied War strategy. The iron ring is broken; not only is the Teutonic Alliance relieved of all military pressure on the Eastern front but sources of supply are opened up which are available by the means of land and water transportation; economic pressure will no longer reinforce our military effort.

Thus readjusting our viewpoint we may appreciate the gravity of the present War situation which Albert R. Carman thus sums up in the Montreal Star:

"The time has come when the truth may as well be faced. The War that we Canadians entered into with such fine spontaneity in 1914—the War into which we have poured so much of our best blood—that War is over. A new War has begun."

Quoting Lord Milner who a few days previous had declared: "Until peace is arranged we are fighting for our lives and the very existence of the free nations of Western Europe."

Mr. Carman concludes that "this is

surely a new war with a new outlook and new War aims."

And Hilaire Belloc, in "Land and Water," recently wrote:

"It is inevitable that men should still think in terms of 1914 Europe, though that Europe has ceased to be but the sooner they learn to think in terms of Europe as it now is in this year of 1918, the better."

Only the other day we read again of the once familiar yet always ghastly policy of attrition:

"Attrition, therefore, is the only answer to the problem. We must, in plain words kill more Germans than the Germans can kill of us, and the more of them we kill, and the quicker we kill them, the better for all concerned. It is not possible to analyze the situation in a military way and come to any other conclusion."

We are much more inclined to agree with "A Student of War" in the Manchester Guardian who writes: "Only fools and parrots say 'Attrition' now."

Fools, parrots, and head-line readers may disagree; but those who read seriously and intelligently the developments of the War know that our old war aims are abandoned and that the much more modest present object is not so certain of attainment.

GERMAN IN THE SCHOOLS

Clothed in a little brief authority some of our legislators would exercise all the arbitrary authority of Prussian junkerdom did the common sense—all too rare just now—of the common people not set limits to their intolerant zeal. A bill has been introduced in the Ontario Legislature to prohibit the study of German in the schools and its use even in churches.

The President of Sandwich College voices the scholar's protest against this latest piece of fool legislation:

Windsor, Feb. 28.—Because of its literary and scientific value in the study of works written in the German language, Rev. Father Forester, president of L'Assomption College, Sandwich, expressed the view today that the passage of prohibitory legislation relative to the teaching of German in Ontario educational institutions would be a "grievous mistake." There are some 75 pupils now taking German with their other studies at the College.

There is so much honest misapprehension and dishonest argument over the use of French in the bilingual schools that it would not be surprising if the rejection of Mr. Godfrey's bill were used to show that German is a more favored language than French in Ontario—a charge already made either in ignorance or in malice. As a matter of fact, the average English-speaking taxpayer who is compelled to retire before the French invasion would be quite willing to pay a double school tax if his children could, in addition to a fair general education, acquire also a working knowledge of the French language.

The necessary regulation of the teaching of French in the so called bilingual schools is no more inspired by hatred of the French language than by the parallax of the moon.

A STELLAR CORRESPONDENT

Some one sent us a copy of the Toronto Star calling attention to a letter from Milan by Rosamond Boulbee. This letter, which is dated Dec. 30th, evidently came by mail as the date of its publication in the Star is Feb. 16th. It is well to note this as it has a bearing on fair Rosamond's qualifications as an Italian correspondent. It may be assumed that she is herself responsible for the spelling as well as for other things not worth mentioning. The letter is headed "Vatican Ignored Capture of Jerusalem by British" and a sub-heading informs the Star readers that "Catholic Organ Dismissed News Curtly, While Other Papers Published Columns of Enthusiastic Comment."

The learned author of "My Unknown Chum" tells of a man who could not order his breakfast in Italian, yet who was the Roman correspondent of a leading American journal. That was half a century or more ago. One would think that this individual should be hard to beat; but the dear girl who represents the Star in a similar capacity could give the nineteenth century ignoramus cards and spades and beat him at his own game. "For several reasons," she writes, "I have waited to speak of the conquest of Jerusalem; but principally because I wished to see how the Pope would act." Just think of it! And no one, not even the ubiquitous Jesuit, warned the Holy Father that Rosamond was watching him from Milan.

She fills two columns with just the sort of piffle one might expect from a girl who refers more than once to the Osservatore Romana, which she parenthetically informs us is "also in the Vatican Trust." She quotes the female Osservatore as "commenting curtly upon it by the remark":

"The fall of Jerusalem is an event which cannot but cause joy to all Christians."

If it were worth while we might "comment curtly by the remark" that Rosamond's English is not much better than her Italian is nil. The Chinese have a bit of proverbial advice which runs something like this: Don't use a pole-axe to kill a mosquito. The perturbation of an anxious correspondent notwithstanding, we should perhaps have allowed Rosamond to impart to such Star readers as are capable of understanding and appreciating its importance, the great discovery that the Osservatore Romana is also in the Vatican Trust (with a capital T). It so happens, however, that a C. P. A. despatch of the very same date, Dec. 30th, is under our hands. It runs in part thus:

"The feelings of the Holy See are exactly summed up in the Osservatore Romano comment that the traditions of the British Empire are a satisfactory guarantee to the Holy See that Catholic rights and interests will be respected."

Since this was omitted from the feminine edition of the semi-official Vatican organ which the stellar correspondent of the Star peruses we thought it worth while to supply the omission. Sorry we can't give the enthusiastic columns and columns that would satisfy the ardent Rosa; but we think the Osservatore Romano, in a masculine way, paid a very fine tribute to the British Empire.

VON HERTLING'S SPEECH

In view of the fact that the formal discussion of Peace terms are being carried on publicly by the official spokesmen of the belligerent nations at the express desire of President Wilson, it is passing strange that our newspapers gave only garbled extracts from the German Chancellor's reply to Wilson's last pronouncement. In this very pronouncement, as we have already noted and emphasized, the President said: "It is gratifying to have our desire so promptly realized that all exchanges of views on the great matter should be made in the hearing of all the world." The failure of the Canadian papers to give the full text of Von Hertling's specific reply to President Wilson's last statement is all the more surprising when we note that the German Chancellor accepts the four governing principles as laid down by the American President.

In spite of the fact that Peace negotiations are being conducted in the hearing of all the world some of our papers find no difficulty in suggesting that no such negotiations are going on at all. And so completely have the headline readers abdicated the functions of their rational faculties, so utterly are they the willing victims of suggestion, that many really hear nothing at all of what is going on in the hearing of all the world.

Seeing that a despatch tells us that the Osservatore Romano approves Von Hertling's speech THE CATHOLIC RECORD gives its full text elsewhere in this issue. Our readers will not have to form their judgment on the being of shreds and patches found in the daily press, but on the precise statements made by the German Chancellor. "All exchanges of view on this great matter should be made in the hearing of all the world."

FORMING ONE'S CONSCIENCE

Father, I didn't fast during Lent; that will be the refrain that will weary the ears of many a confessor at Easter time. Now if one is not obliged to fast, as is the case with the majority of our people, why does he make his not fasting a matter of confession? If, on the other hand, he is in doubt as to whether the law of fasting is binding upon him or not, it is his duty to consult, before Lent, his confessor who is appointed judge in the matter, and who, for a just reason, can dispense him from the obligation. It is never permitted to act with a doubtful conscience; yet many, who are in doubt as to how far the Lenten regulations are binding upon them, give themselves the benefit of the doubt, and fondly imagine that they have acquitted themselves of the obligation of doing penance by mea-

tioning the matter in their Easter confession.

Some people, to whom a serious violation of the moral law would be abhorrent, seem to have a very ill-informed conscience in regard to the precepts of the Church that bind under pain of mortal sin. To miss Mass deliberately and not to feel any remorse about it is a sign of a false or deadened conscience. To miss Mass deliberately is a mortal sin; consequently it kills the soul as surely as would the crime of murder. A good Catholic who is desirous of keeping himself in the state of grace will avoid anything that would take away the supernatural life of his soul, just as he would defend himself against any danger to his natural life. Indifference about committing mortal sin, so long as it is not one that would shock the moral sense of the community, is certainly an indication of lack of faith, a sign that one has, to say the least, a very hazy conception of the supernatural existence that he should lead.

Others there are who serve God with a twelve-inch rule. They are adepts at forming their conscience. They have studied up the matter and they know just how far they can go without committing mortal sin, just what they are bound to do sub gravi; and they go that far and no further, they do that much and no more. While a measure of praise is due to such people for avoiding a serious violation of the law, yet they should remember that such an ungenerous service of God will make their religion of very little consolation to them in the hour of sorrow and trouble. Moreover they should bear in mind that final perseverance is a free gift of God, which He is most likely to bestow upon those who have served Him with a generous heart. Very often this class of people, by reason of their education and other advantages, have it in their power to do much for the advancement of religion and the salvation of souls. Their selfish inertia is, therefore, all the more to be condemned.

It were well if people realized that the only heaven they can have on this earth is the heaven of a good conscience. If there is a world to-day it is because the peoples of the different nations, or at least the ruling element among them, have been trying to create a heaven upon this earth without any reference to the life to come. The result has been that they have created a veritable hell upon earth. It would seem that God is showing the world that this terrestrial sphere was never intended to be a heaven, where man could rest secure in the enjoyment of natural comforts. Certainly the countries in which war is actually taking place are not suggestive of paradise; and who will say that this Canada of ours is a heavenly place? We have religious and racial strife, political, economic and social unrest. We are suffering from a shortage of food and fuel. Add to this extremes of climate that leave the cellars flooded one day, the water pipes frozen the next, and scarcely a home without a mustard plaster, and who will say that the situation is conducive to beatitude, who will cry out in ecstasy "It is good for us to be here." Whether or not it is good for us to be here, the fact remains that we are here, and the way to make the best of the situation is to be attentive to that silent monitor, "that voice of the Divinity that stirs within us," our conscience; and possess our souls in patience during the trying times through which we are passing.

"The old cry: 'God wills!' The old sign: a blood-red cross Gain is begotten of loss On to the snow-clad hills!

THE GLEANER

NOTES AND COMMENTS

IT MAY NOT be generally known that Mr. Philip Gibbs, who has been hailed by Gilbert Chesterton as "the first and finest war correspondent this War has produced," is a Catholic. Premier Lloyd George's presence at a staff dinner tendered to Mr. Gibbs, and his speech in toasting the guest of the evening, were not only an endorsement of Chesterton's verdict, but have in addition been referred to as the greatest compliments paid to a newspaper man in many years. That these compliments were well deserved there is practically universal agreement.

Mr. Gibbs' conspicuous place in London journalism is held purely by right of talent. Without family influence or "pull" of any kind, but by sheer force of ability and capacity

for hard work, he has won his way into the front rank of his profession, and during the course of the present Conflict has, by his vivid word pictures of the din and heat of battle and of the daily life of the soldier, made his name a household word in two hemispheres.

Mr. Gibbs though not exactly a young man is still in the prime of life, having been born in 1877. He took to journalism naturally, and before blossoming into a War correspondent, had good work to his credit on several London papers. His opportunity came on the breaking out of the Balkan War, when he was sent to the front by the Daily Graphic. The experiences gained in those "tempestuous wilds of Eastern Europe," (as some imaginative writer has termed them) made possible his brilliant work from the start of the present War, during which he has continued to represent the Graphic, and also the Daily Chronicle. It is in the columns of the latter that his reputation has been mainly made, and it may also be said with truth, that he has earned for the Chronicle the distinction of being the best-informed of the London papers on the daily unfolding of events on the Western front. Mr. Gibbs is said to be naturally reserved and reticent, but in conversation with intelligent and appreciative listeners his mastery of the mysteries of this greatest of all wars soon becomes apparent.

IN VIEW of the copious abuse directed against the Holy Father by irresponsible journalists in Europe and America, the following from the Church Times—not ordinarily very friendly in this regard—is worth noting:

"The Pope has once more moved in the direction of peace making. His right to do it is indisputable. We may go further, and say that it is his duty so to act when the time is opportune. By the common consent of mankind, with the exception of those few Protestants who still believe that he is Anti-Christ, he is the foremost minister of Christ in the world. Moreover, he stands alone among the ministers of Christ in his international position, being a subject of no secular State. It is his right and his duty to act forward, as much as lies in his power, peace and charity among all men."

OR THIS, in answer to those who out of the fulness of their ignorance and malice impute to the august Head of the Church a spirit of un-friendliness to the Allied cause:

"We shall not follow the example of those who say that the Pope is a partisan or a tool of the Central Powers. . . . There is no ground for alleging that Benedict XV. and his Secretary of State are anything but honestly neutral and honest peacemakers. It is no derogation from that standing if they are by force of circumstances better informed about the views of one belligerent than of others. Nor are they to blame if any suggestions which they make are coloured by their information. It is inevitable."

WE HAVE referred more than once to Cardinal Mercier as the outstanding figure of the War. This, of course, does not mean that he is the only outstanding figure; far from it. When in the course of time the world's affairs resume their customary channels, and the nations have had time to adjust and appraise the acts of the belligerents, we have no doubt in our own mind that Benedict XV. will receive the recognition that is his due. The course of no other personage during this time of stress has been beset with so many or so great difficulties, nor have the actions of any been directed by more exalted principles of justice and humanity. To his own spiritual children this has been apparent throughout; to others it will come in due time.

APART, TOO, from the soldiers and statesmen who are foremost in the world's eyes, there are other figures that stand out majestically, shoulder to shoulder as it were, beside the great Belgian prelate. Of these, Cardinal Lucon, Archbishop of Rheims at once occurs to mind. In the midst of the desert of ruins which his cathedral and its approaches have become, he has maintained his station throughout as the father of his people and the guardian of their sacred privileges. Nothing, says an observer, impresses one like his serenity and charity amidst the strain and turmoil of his surroundings. As soon as the squalor of a new bombardment ceases, the Cardinal may be seen passing

through ruined streets without any regard to his personal safety, seeking for those of his flock who still remain. And thus he has continued from the first day of the great invasion, and thus, should he be spared, will he continue until the cloud of war has passed away. Then will men remember that all the heroes do not wear military uniforms nor are spurs necessarily their distinguishing emblem.

THE LATEST development of the profiteer and cold-storage man in the United States is the vending of "stored" cream. A committee of New York medical men last week presented to the Federal Board charges of profiteering in this commodity, and of holding cream in cold storage from last summer to reap higher prices. The charges grew out of the examination of a bottle of spoiled cream served to a patient of a practitioner in West 96th Street. The cream was "off" in taste, according to the physician, and at first he could not tell what was wrong with it. It just tasted differently from ordinary creams and, "somewhat stale," as he described it, inspection of the label conveyed the information that the bottle was from cold-storage, but the words "cold storage" were so small as to be unnoticeable except after the closest scrutiny.

THIS HAS led to an investigation. "I am certainly astonished," said one physician, in connection therewith, "that an article needing such care in handling as cream, is permitted to be kept for long periods in storage, and then sold. If any article should be consumed when absolutely fresh, I should say cream and milk should be. Their propensity to carry disease germs is well known. Infected milk is a chief source of infantile disorders. How the Health Department could ever permit the selling of storage cream to the trade I cannot understand."

IT WAS admitted at the office of the Health Department that cold storage cream was on sale in New York, and had been on sale for some time. It was said to be legal. Dr. Boldman's attention was called to the fact that purchasers of the cream claimed it was held from last summer merely to gain increased profit. "Well, the poor do not buy cream," he said, "so the question of profit won't disturb the people as does the question of profit on milk, which is so high priced and so essential." Meantime, the matter is being looked into. Herein lies a hint for Canada's vigilant sentinel, Food-profit Investigator O'Connor.

ON THE BATTLE LINE

LONDON, March 1.—According to The Daily Mail it is understood that the Allies have decided to ask the Japanese to take any steps necessary for the protection of the Allies in the Far East.

Stress is laid on the fact that the British and Japanese governments hold that Japan's intervention in the Russian affairs is not to be construed as hostility to Russia or the Russian Government. Its purpose is to safeguard menaced allied interests and to protect stores and munitions at Vladivostok and to assist Russia to lighten and eventually lift the burden of the German yoke.

GEN. FOCH ON WAR SITUATION

The famous General Foch is now Associate War Minister of France. An interview which he gave to Charles H. Graseby, representing the N. Y. Times, received great prominence in the French press, a fact which adds to its importance. Interview follows:

Paris, Feb. 27.—I went to the fountain source today for information and reassurance on the German offensive and I got both. My first question was: "What is the chance of the Germans being able to break through?"

Gen. Foch, before answering, took a few puffs at his two-cent cigar and looked at me with a smile of quiet confidence in his bright brown eyes. "They won't break through," he said, and the words were as persuasive as pistol shots. "They tried that at the Marne. They then had troops of first quality, while we were unprepared. They failed. They tried at Lassigny, in October, 1914, and at Arras. Again on the Yser and at Ypres they made very strong attacks, which they repented. They failed everywhere in their attempt to break through. Again, in the following April, at what is known as the second battle of Ypres, they attacked, this time using gas, against which we had not then the protection of masks. They gained three miles, but were unable to break through. Finally, at Verdun, in 1916, they made a great effort. Their artillery was much superior to ours. This attempt began in February and lasted till July. It was a failure."