

## Impulsive Social Action

It is through the influence of impulsive leaders upon impulsive peoples that deliriums of social madness are begotten

By J. W. MACMILLAN.

There are certain persons who are known as "creatures of impulse." However fascinating and romantic these persons may be no one will trust their leadership. They are devoid of those qualities of caution, foresight, deliberation, and endurance which deserve and win the confidence of their fellowmen. Impulses when uncontrolled are disastrous things.

When a machinist, working in the midst of sharp-edged and rapidly revolving machinery feels a prick in the end of a finger it is not wise for him to pull his hand back with a jerk. By so doing he might lose his hand in collision with a saw or be caught in a belt. Yet that is the provocation of impulse. It is the first suggestion when danger is signalled by the nerves. An experienced and cool-headed workman, in such an event, takes time to glance at the road by which he will extricate the imperilled hand. Such a thought, and such a glance, remove him at once out of the category of "creatures of impulse."

Now, these things are still more true of the action of mankind in the mass than of individual action. The phenomena of impulse are magnified when we deal with a crowd. There is no such orgy of impulse as that of the mob. No man, however mercurial and volatile may be his nature, can rise to the heights of impulsive action when alone. It is as a member of a mob that he utterly forgets caution and deliberation and abandons himself unrestrainedly to the promptings of impulse.

### THE CLIMAX.

The mob is the climax of impulsive social action. There riot and fury are at their worst, and the vilest things become possible. But we do not require to assemble a mob in order to behold the excesses and injuries, the injustices and blunders of impulsive social action. The will of a city or a nation, expressed through its elected representatives, its newspapers, and its public opinion, may be based on impulse, and, while probably not so violent in expression or ruinous in result as if the citizens had gathered in a mob, may still be irresponsible, foolish, mistaken and sufficiently disastrous.

### CLASSIFIED.

The peoples of the world may be classified according as they are impulsive or deliberate in their social action. The peoples who prevail, who master their circumstances, and choose and direct their rulers, are peoples of deliberation. These are the leading nations of the world. On the other hand are the victim peoples, betrayed by their own inordinate passions into the hands of tyrants, or lost in the degradation of their uncurbed vices.

It has been observed that hot weather favors impulse, while cold weather favors deliberation. The canniness of the Scot accords with his land of "mists and drizzles," while the vendetta flourishes in the heat of Sicily. In the statistics of crime it appears that the summer is the period when offences are most common. Indeed, every heat wave brings up the number of assaults, robberies and suicides. Buckle thought that other conditions, such as liability to tempests and earthquakes had a similar effect. Spencer ascribed huge racial divergencies to the presence or lack of a high degree of humidity.

### CONDITIONS.

Beyond the physical provocations, however, there are mental conditions which govern the use of impulse by any given population.

It is spread and intensified by suggestion. It breeds rumors, and loves them the more for being glib and slanderous. Macaulay judges the mental calibre of the people of England by the number and acceptability of the stories which were circulated concerning the death of Charles the Second. A people who eagerly believes that the dead monarch was poisoned till it is suggested that he was slain by divine interposition stamps itself as a people unlikely to manage its affairs with any considerable amount of wisdom. No one who calmly views the part which catch-words and "roorbacks" play in election times among ourselves can exonerate our citizenship from a similar accusation.

Imitation also plays a major role. Originality, independence, inventiveness are ruled out. Discrimination in choosing which example shall be imitated is discounted. The most vivid and spectacular and vociferous man becomes the chosen lead-

er. It becomes easy to shout "Death to traitors!" once the cry has been raised. If there is defeat the man who roars, "We are betrayed!" is instantly believed. If prices are high the man who screams against middlemen or profiteers gets a hearing which the man who talks of increasing money in circulation, or of decrease of productive effort, cannot gain.

### IGNORANCE.

Impulsive social action is based on ignorance. For any careful study of a given situation requires material to work with. One cannot deliberate without possessing food for thought. Impulse rages in a vacuum. That is why the character of the press of a country is significant of the nature of the methods by which the people act. Let them know the truth about things and they are the more likely to deal bravely and wisely with them. Conceal the truth, or hide it behind censorship and party objects which control the press, and you will have a people both hasty and blundering. The exclusion of such a book as "The Fiddlers" from Canada on the grounds set forth in Parliament can only be justified if the people of Canada are so impulsive as to be unfit to judge of what they read.

When fear is imposed on ignorance we have the most favorable conditions for impulsive social action. The isolated settler may live in constant apprehension of wolves, but a spectre inspires him with terror. It is the menace of the unknown and the incalculable which breeds madness in a community. Some of the alarms current among us at the present time are fomented by the dim dread arising from the war, for there is nothing more incalculable than war. There is a constant strife going on between the deliberative and the impulsive factors in our national life. Our intelligence, our patriotism, our devotion to ideals of justice and liberty act as a steadying force, while our ignorance, fear and sectarianism stir up the emotional storm. And, of course, there are not wanting ambitious leaders who make the most of the impulses to advance their own ends. Most of these are quite sincere persons, whose qualification for leadership consists in their own hyper-emotional endowments.

Cities are more prone to impulsive action than rural districts, for there the favoring conditions of close association and lack of inducement to observe and think are present. Moreover cities are, in these days of many migrations, composed of polyglot peoples, who cannot easily think together. Rational sympathy is forbidden them because their presuppositions are so diverse. How can an Irishman and an American find a common social view-point? So they fall back upon the emotional plane, which is much more primitive and common. If they cannot agree upon principles they can agree upon personal likes and dislikes. Hence our cities are strongholds of personal government. They follow heroes, often of a sorry kind, rather than frame and execute policies. A city like Glasgow, with a homogeneous population, may pursue a deliberate civic programme, but a city like New York, with its conglomerate mass of divergent races, must have its boss. Its only hope at present is a better boss than formerly. There must be much social assimilation before it is possible to unite so many different kinds of citizens in common purposive effort.

Impulse is always direct. Deliberation is generally indirect in method. To impulse the way to reduce the high cost of living is simply for the government to fix prices. But the informed and thoughtful citizen, even as he scrapes the bottom of the flour barrel, knows that that may only increase the trouble. At any rate, he wants to know what effect such governmental action will have on the processes of production, distribution and exchange, by means of which the citizens earn their incomes. For such apparently timid and hesitating action the demagogue has hearty contempt. The right thing in his eyes is the bold thing, the sweeping thing, the violent thing, and he is easily able to convince many that he is a wise and resolute man.

If the question were not the comparatively peaceful one of food, but one which involved life and death, as in the countries which are the theatres of the war, we can see how the play of these same forces might mean the choice, not between patience and

impatience, but between order and disorder. It is through the influence of impulsive leaders upon impulsive peoples that deliriums of social madness are begotten. Such is the case in Russia to-day, and it has shown itself at the worst in the army, because the conditions are most propitious there. There is the close gathering of many together, with the lack of information which is inevitable in the masses of a fighting organization added to the general illiteracy of the Russian soldiery, and the fierce foe-right before them.

### PRISONERS' PARCELS.

In co-ordination with the new scheme instigated by the British Government, all parcels from Canada to Officer Prisoners of War interned in Germany or Austria-Hungary containing foodstuffs, on and after January 1st, 1918, can only be accepted for onward transmission by the Postal Service if they bear a "coupon" issued by the Prisoners of War Department, Canadian Red Cross Society, London, England.

Under the new arrangement, the amount of foodstuffs which may be sent to an Officer Prisoner of War during four weeks must not exceed one hundred pounds. Of this total, the Prisoners of War Department of the Canadian Red Cross will send to each interned Canadian Officer including those attached to other than Canadian units, not less than six ten-pound parcels each four weeks. The remaining forty pounds of foodstuffs per four weeks may be sent personally by relatives in Canada, but each parcel must bear a coupon which can be obtained on application from the Prisoners of War Department, Canadian Red Cross Society, London, England.

The right to send food parcels to an Officer Prisoner of War rests with the next of kin, but may be transferred by the latter or by the Prisoner of War himself to any person. It is advisable that application should be made to the Prisoners of War Department, Canadian Red Cross Society, London, England, for the necessary coupons for parcels packed personally at the earliest possible moment.

These coupons are to be used on food parcels only, and no coupons can be issued for amounts under ten pounds. If, therefore, it is desired to despatch a parcel weighing less than ten pounds an ordinary coupon must be used, and the parcel counts as one of the four permissible in four weeks.

Articles may not be sent to any Society for enclosure in any parcel despatched under the Red Cross label. The importance of guarding against any misuse of the label cannot be too strongly emphasized. Such action would not only harm the prisoner to whom the parcel was addressed, but would react on other prisoners, and might endanger the whole system of despatching the food supplies to officers and men who have fallen into the hands of the enemy.

Parcels for Officers interned in Bulgaria and Turkey come under the new scheme. Owing, however, to the difficulties of postal communication, it is not advisable to send many parcels to officers in Turkish camps. Supplies can be purchased in Asia Minor, and it is better to remit money to the prisoners rather than send many parcels.

This new scheme relates only to parcels containing foodstuffs for Officer Prisoners of War interned in enemy countries, and does not affect in any way the present regulations governing the transmission of parcels to Prisoners of War other than Officers, which regulations remain unchanged.

The needs of Officer Prisoners of War holding commissions in the Imperial Army are looked after by the Central Prisoners of War Committee, 4 Thurloe Place, London, S.W., England. This committee will supply the necessary coupons to the next of kin of these Officers for parcels addressed to them which are packed personally.

### EXPERIMENTAL FARM REPORTS.

For the convenience of specialists, farmers, and others interested in the different lines of agriculture dealt with in the three-volume annual report of the Dominion Experimental Farm, the several subjects have been issued in separate pamphlet form. These include the reports of the Dominion Animal Husbandman, of the Dominion Cerealist, of the Dominion Horticulturist, of the Supervisor of Illustration Stations, of the Dominion Apiarist and of the Dominion Tobacco Husbandman. Any of these reports can be had on application to the Publications Branch, Department of Agriculture at Ottawa.