

BLACKFRIARS

A MONTHLY REVIEW

Edited by the English Dominicans

Published by Basil Blackwell, Broad Street, Oxford.

VOL. XXVII. No. 314.

MAY, 1946.

ONE SHILLING.

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HUMPTY DUMPTY

HUMPTY DUMPTY was a good egg. His delicate covering was hard, round and smooth, well-made for its purpose, but easily broken. His crisp circumferential discipline kept him wholly together as a whole, even on all sides, not nobbly or unjust. He was not circular; his unity and wholeness were not egalitarian. Humpty Dumpty was not intended to rest, balanced on a wall. He should have lain close up to his brothers in the nest, held in warm proximity by the living body of his mother.

So the nation, isolated from the other nations, exposed to many contrary winds and any passing marauder, is an easy and defenceless prey. A small Dumpty nation may be pocketed by some enemy, as Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania have been removed from their isolation. Or it may wobble doubtfully alone till it falls, as France fell before the violence of Hitler, or as England may yet fall either to American money power or to Soviet propaganda or even to Soviet arms.

Such a fall means what it meant for Humpty Dumpty. Its goodness is dispersed, its unity smashed. The goodness is there but almost irretrievably scattered. Discipline lies in pieces no longer able to hold the whole together. Integrity has been lost. Is there no way of recovering lost integrity? The nursery rhyme chooses the most

obvious and the more possible remedy, that of monarchical dictatorship, but points to the futility of even that. The King with all his armed forces cannot gather the remains together and fashion a whole, restored nation, well formed and held together as before.

Most European nations to-day seem to lie in Humpty's state after the fall. Perhaps France takes the lead as the supreme example. The old traditions of culture and civilization remain with her still. The French people retain a great sense of proportion, and have not so far been carried away *en masse* to any irrational excess, such as we have witnessed in Italy and Germany. They are on the whole objective and balanced in their judgment of home and world affairs. Further they have a strong urge to rebuild the ruins. Everywhere the country already shows the signs of the peasants' instinct to cover the ravages of war with his indomitable if somewhat selfish energy. The peasant does not easily give way to despair so long as he is allowed to remain on his land. And the same signs of recovery can be seen in the towns as well.

But all these good qualities and undaunted energies lie sprawled out across the nation, incapable of producing any national result because integrity has gone. Co-operation, the entelechy which makes one nation, the discipline which hold all together in an harmonious whole, all these are lacking. It was noticed that even in the concentration camps of Germany the French, unlike the Russians, did not, as a rule, hold together or work as a group for some common end. Each Frenchman has his own idea of what is needed, each is filled with a genuine and almost ferocious desire for the restoration of the French nation, and thus he even shares with his fellows a Common End. But the end is his own. The politicians are said to be a corrupt set, but they reflect in reality the spirit, not of a corrupt nation, but of a dis-integrated nation whose goodness is wasted in confusion.

In this predicament the French seem prepared to call for the King's horses and men; they would have a dictator with power either from above or from below. They feel that in order to gather the nation together again an extrinsic force is required, not part of themselves but, if possible, still French. At present this extrinsic, yet French force seems to be offered by only two powers, that of a dictatorial General de Gaulle, or the dictatorial single party of the Communists. Either would seem to offer some hope of forcing the country to pull itself together even though it would be at the expense of a great number of individual rights and even of individual persons.

Yet the truth remains that no monarchical power can put Humpty Dumpty together again. These dictatorial systems may appear to be the last hope, but in truth they are no hope at all. A new France

will never rise up under an uncompromising power either of right or left. The good elements would be suppressed by such methods. Men cannot be forced to collaborate or to adopt the same point of view. The good will that exists in so many quarters would be overwhelmed and become mixed with all sorts of evil and extraneous matter under such pressure.

The disintegration of France is only one example of the disintegration of Europe. There is no need to suspect evil forces of keeping Europe prostrate under famine and fear. No doubt there are such evil men who desire only their own selfish ends. But the majority of Europeans remain good Europeans anxious for reconstruction and a new and peaceful life. They are not morally corrupt, except insofar as this extreme individualism which renders them all incapable of re-uniting, is itself a moral corruption. Their designs are not evil, nor yet selfish. But it is useless to *tell* them to unite, to insist that the general good of Europe demands that all the differences of party and nation be sunk in a common cause—the restoration of Christian man. They will agree, but they can do nothing. The exasperation caused by such ineptitude has led some to look to the King's horses and men. It has even been said that had Hitler won the war he would have provided a framework of European unity in which the good elements could have survived and gradually leavened the whole into the form of some new Christendom; and meantime a great bulwark would have been raised against the encroachments of Russia. But the good elements of Europe would never have survived the dictatorial efforts of such a King, and there can be little choice between a force of that nature and this other which now seems to threaten, namely the Bolshevik unification of Europe into a system of soviets. The Soviet King with all his horses and all his men has been at work to put half Europe together according to his plan, and he seems to threaten a similar treatment to the other half.

The nursery rhyme takes us no further. It tells us only of the hopelessness of our present efforts at reconstruction. Even Lewis Carroll did not let Alice return to Humpty Dumpty after the fall; he showed her only a glimpse of the futility of the King's horses and men. The application of discipline and hierarchic authority on an unresponsive mass is useless and disastrous. If there were an interior answer to such external power there would be hope and the parable of Humpty Dumpty would not be so appropriate. For there is another breaking of the shell which brings hope of new life and new unity. A force stirs within and a new unity of life bursts forth as Christ himself bursts forth from the constraint of the tomb. The renovation which we desire will be possible only in so far by it comes

from within men's minds and wills. Hierarchy and discipline will be required, but these will be more simple and diverse. An external directive is needed, but there must be within an answering call to authority, and this we call the virtue of obedience. Exterior authority and force without interior obedience spells tyranny, slavery, dictatorship. But where there is a correspondence between the human will and the government which directs the will, then there exists a bond which is capable of binding men into a whole, a living integrity.

Perhaps, therefore, Europe's only hope of escaping the fate of Humpty Dumpty lies in a renewal of the virtue of obedience. But if that be so the word needs to be exorcised, for to so many it implies precisely its opposite; it implies servility and therefore the marshalled masses of dictatorship. In fact this virtue means a free and deliberate choice, an act of the human will which recognises for what it is, the will of a superior, a will which accepts voluntarily direction from above. A man does not act obediently because it is reasonable to act thus; he does not follow the dictates of a command because the command appears to him a sensible thing to do. Perhaps it is just in this that the spirit of obedience has been allowed to fail. Modern education prides itself much in making all men understand almost everything, so that each individual may imagine that he knows about economics, politics, international affairs, social matters of all sorts. The result is that he thinks he knows the right way of doing things, and so he does them because he knows and never because a superior has commanded him. He will "obediently" ride on the left hand of the road in England and on the right in France, not because he has been directed to do so, but only because he thinks it reasonable that people keep to one side who go in one direction. He will change his clock to summer time at the appointed hour for it would be unreasonable to keep his own time against the rest of the world. He is not obedient in this. Perhaps the numerous political parties in France with all their passionate adherents witness to the fact that each has judged for himself and none will accept the word of a superior. This at least is clear: in so far as obedience disappears, to that extent does the gathering of many men, many human wills, into one group, into one accord, become more difficult and eventually impossible. The integrity of nations depends on the obedience of the nationals.

Obedience is a virtue by which a man performs an action because he is told to do it by a superior, and for no other reason. It is a moral virtue, which means to say that it is a dynamic force springing from within a man; it is a quality of his free will. There is no question then of the King's horses and the King's men, which constitute the

external force of compulsion. Certainly the nature of the virtue demands that the obedient man's mind is *formed* by the mind of another. His thought follows the thought of his rightly constituted superior, in such a manner that he has the same, not similar, thoughts. He does not investigate the same premises as his superior and come to the same conclusions. He accepts the conclusions from his superior precisely because of the latter's superiority. This was, for example, the only basis on which the supporters of the justice of the war in 1939 and 1940 could stand in rebutting the opinion of the pacifists. That is why the pacifists themselves are for the most part so given to anarchy and so far from being men of peace—they are men of good will, but not men who know obedience. A justly constituted authority may speak on such matters without having to justify its words by stating all its reasons. A rightly constituted government decides to wage war; the first duty of the citizen is to accept the declaration of war.

Evidently the authority varies in its demands on the minds of its subjects. It is only within its own competence that it can ask for an acceptance of its mind and purpose. With the authority of Christ this is absolute, and "putting on the mind of Christ" demands an acceptance of his whole outlook upon the whole of reality. The Church demands this acceptance in matters of faith and morals, but does not claim to direct the thoughts of her children in matters of pure science, mathematics or music. The family takes on the mind of the father in all that concerns the family as a whole. In other words the extent of the individual's obedience depends upon the nature of the unity to which he belongs; and among all the *essential* unities or groups of men in this world that of the State has perhaps the most limited claim. The true understanding of democracy should show to what extent the citizen is allowed to criticize and to judge for himself the acts of his democratic government, and to what extent he is bound by virtue of his membership of the State to accept the mind of his government once it has been justly established. Although a constitutional democracy does, in fact, make the fewest demands on the obedience of its subjects, obedience must be present or there will be no unity, no dynamic force springing from the people who are to be democratically governed. Perhaps the fortitude and perseverance with which the people of democratic Britain fought two otherwise dubious and disastrous wars within a space of forty years show that they have retained that spirit, the inner force of obedience. But the modern system of education, as already suggested, is rapidly sapping this vital force.

The virtue then rests on accepting the mind and will of another, and true solidarity springs from that unity of spirit. A crowd of men

all walking the same way to a football match has no unity because each unit in the crowd has his own desire to satisfy his own particular appetite for "sport"; he has not come because told to do so. But the team he watches has a unity if it is playing as it should under the direction of the Captain. It is not simply that each member of the team has the goal for his aim—the crowd in its way has that one aim—but that he is directed thereunto by a leader. A good team plays with one mind and one will; a good team is an obedient team under a good captain.

The objection will be raised here that we have no captains. Look at the corrupt politicians of France, the inept leaders of the Labour Party in England, the self-satisfied and self-important little figure of General Franco, is Europe to profess obedience to such as these? This putting on of the mind of a superior demands that there should in reality be a superior; for it demands a trust, a faith, which we can see in its perfect form in the divine faith which holds the Church together as one mystical body, but which must also be present, a national faith, in the national unity of the State. It is indeed a riddle, but we can say with some certainty that once granted this interior force of obedience among Europeans leaders worthy of that spirit would appear. It is rather the lack of obedience than the lack of leaders from which we suffer. For the leaders without the co-existence of the inner virtue can only be dictators on the side of the King's horses and the King's men, powerless to pull the affairs of 1946 together. This interior force can turn even the false step of authority into a step forward; witness the unquestioning obedience and respect of a good family of children for their father even though he is often wrong or muddle-headed. Their unquestioning support brings to him a sense of responsibility and assists him to lead the family to prosperity. Their obedience, in fact, acts as a purification of his authority. This inner virtue, which we may as truly call faith as obedience, must now arise within the men of Europe to give the lie to the apparent fall of Humpty Dumpty. Even at this eleventh hour it can begin to move within Europe and crack the fragile covering of discipline, not with the crash of broken authoritarian régimes, but with the emergence of new life, stepping out of the old constrictions, turning rigid discipline into the suppleness of living duty, turning the nourishing good will into the vital force of the obedient will. Let us avoid the foolishness of Alice's Humpty Dumpty: "*If I did fall . . . the King has promised me—with his own mouth . . .*" But had he remained snugly in his nest we could be more sanguine about the birth of a European chick in the 20th century. We have left him too long balancing perilously on his wall, trusting in the power of the King's horses. THE EDITOR.