

ST. GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

THAT 'an Englishman is never so happy as when he is miserable' is true up to a certain point, but we have got far beyond that point; hence there is none to the paradox.

Englishmen just now are very miserable indeed, for there is no misery quite so poignant as that which comes from the lowest depths of pessimism. What we need in these days is fervent and true patriotism, and there is a great gulf fixed between patriotism and pessimism.

Patriotism is derided and scoffed at *in England*, though, curiously enough, not in Ireland, Scotland or even Wales. Yet there never was a time when we Englishmen more needed true patriots, a rallying cry and a cause. The trouble is that whilst glorying in our history, we are coming to believe that we have no first-class possibility for the future. We are accepting as a first axiom that we are doomed to become a second-rate country. The peril is not so much our politics as our pessimism; not so much the Dole as the Dumps.

As a country our hopes are deteriorating, our ideals are drooping, our enthusiasms are withering. We are not moving through the desert, we are settling down there. Over England there spreads the pale cast of cynicism. We are losing heart, and when a nation loses heart, it loses everything. It is not that we are making bricks with a shortage of straw, rather that we are building without a plan. We do not know what to build. We quake and whine in the daily press and in the monthly magazines as though we were for ever vanquished.

We are not told who the enemy is or where. The temperature of the country falls in the presence of cynical icebergs. We are staggered by daily bulletins from the headquarters of godless intellectualism.

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Pessimism goes hand in hand with debauchery and criminality—the natural results of the deification of materialism and pleasure. True patriotism is not popular. Poison gas is. Take two samples at random. Professor Julian Huxley, with impudent ignorance, tells us in the name of Science that we must abandon the idea of God, and Bernard Shaw cries from ‘The Apple Cart,’ ‘Had we not better teach our children to be better citizens than ourselves? We are not doing that at present; *The Russians are*. That is my last word. Think over it.’ The admitted condition of the children in Russia makes one wonder why such clap-trap is printed.

Every day we have *dinned* into our ears with slight variations the dictum that Mammon is the maker of nations. Is our country worth fighting for? A glance at its history and the response of our own hearts would suggest that it is. When one realises that it has been and may become again, a land of saints, that it is the Dowry of Mary, the suggestion becomes a certainty. There is no guarantee, of course, that our country, as we know it, may not be wiped out utterly, leaving no trace behind. Fr. Kane says that ‘history is a funeral march through the tombs of dead nations.’ But for nations, as for men, there is a time to be born and a time to die, and I believe and pray that England’s time to die is far distant. In any case, while we live, it is our duty to seek the things of true life and not those of death.

We are seeking death when a fear of its coming is in the hearts of the people. Whenever a country has been threatened, the first whisper of that threat has always been heard in the streets of its own cities.

Much has been said and written in our day about modern youth. It has been censured, cajoled, threatened and invoked. In spite of modern conventions, and morality, youth is always the same, with ideals,

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courage, adaptability and lack of experience. It is my faith that there exists a large army of young people in our land who would do anything, dare anything, suffer anything for their country if they only knew what to do. Surrounded with the mutterings of materialism and the poison of pessimism, they await a bugle call and a leader. They are priceless raw material and their fine careless rapture could be enlisted in a crusade. I believe they would listen to a bugle call from the only hope of England—the Church of their fathers. I believe they would follow a banner emblazoned with the figure of St. George!

Why should not St. George mean for England what St. Patrick means for Ireland? It is usually objected that we know little of St. George. What there is to be known should be made known. It is more than enough. I question whether English Catholics as a whole know as much as they could and should of the lives of the saints. Louis Bertrand says of St. Augustine that ‘he is now little more than a celebrated name. Outside of learned or theological circles, people no longer read him . . . we admire the saints, as we do great men, on trust.’

It is true that there is less known about St. George than about many saints, yet there is enough recorded to prove what is necessary to prove, as there is about Our Lord Himself. The briefest biography of a saint I know is in the Old Testament, where we read of Enoch that ‘. . . he walked with God and was seen no more, because God took him.’ Less could hardly be said, or more; but this life will still be the inspiration of countless numbers when many a three-volume biography is forgotten.

In Butler’s ‘Lives of the Saints’ there is an eloquent page and a half about our Patron Saint, and I have recently seen and would warmly recommend a C. T. S. booklet on ‘St. George, Protector of England,’ by

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Fr. J. W. Reeks. It is sufficient for my purpose here to state that St. George, soldier and martyr of the fourth century, was the Patron of the Crusaders under Richard I of England, and that he was declared Protector of the Kingdom of England by Benedict XIV. Centuries before the time of that Pope, St. George was recognised officially as the patron saint of the most highly-prized order of knighthood in the world, the Order of the Garter, and also of the English nation.

Like St. Ignatius Loyola, St. George was a soldier, therefore he stands for those virtues so distasteful and so necessary to our age, obedience and discipline. It has been well said that, 'foremost among the rights of man is the right to obey and to be put under discipline!' The good time which is the objective of so many people to-day will last a very short time indeed unless we *are* disciplined in mind, soul and body. Our birthright is not to be found on the mount of self-seeking, but in the valley of service.

The Divine Right of Kings is their right to serve, and the more we have of anything, the richer can we be, and should be, in sacrifice. We have sight to lead the blind, strength to help the weak. In proportion as we approximate to perfection we shall carry our brother's burdens. It is not Christ, the sinless, but the Pharisee who will not speak to the Magdalene. The call of St. George to discipline, service and sacrifice in the present desperate situation will be responded to by the best at their best.

It would not be pertinent to discuss Fascist politics, but we all admit that Mussolini's call to the youth of Italy for discipline and sacrifice in his country's hour of need, met with an unparelled and successful response, and that in a land supposed by Anglo-Saxons to be lethargic. One may or may not agree with Mussolini's programme; I am not here concerned with it. Rather I am concerned with the genius which is not

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tentative or apologetic in asking for whole-hearted love-loyalty in an hour of perilous need.

Before we go forth in the name of St. George, we must be quite clear as to whither he would lead us. There are many Englands. There is the England of flags and boast and show. There are incidental and artificial nationalisms calling loudly upon us in the name of patriotism to swear unflinching allegiance to Mammon. But the England worth fighting for, round which our affections cling, is the England of the Martyrs, the Confessors and the Saints: the England of imperishable patriotism. Patriotism is one of the worst-abused words in our language. Dr. Johnson defined it as 'the last refuge of a scoundrel,' by which he did not mean to censure patriotism, but rather the man who used it as a cloak for self-interest.

It has become fashionable and profitable in certain quarters to sneer at the land of one's nativity. Such an attitude is certainly not Christian. Human character, and the highest development of the human race, is best worked out by each country fulfilling its own destiny, doing its own work, and being loyal to its own traditions. Against certain current innuendo, I would state that a good Catholic may be, and often is, in the highest sense, the best patriot. The history of English Catholics, even under intolerable persecution, is a proof of this. For a Catholic, the word patriotism is sweetened with holy associations and used for the highest service of the nation. English Catholics have nailed the word to the Cross of Christ, entwined it in His crown, enshrined it in their homes, consecrated it at God's altar, and hallowed it in God's acre.

Catholicism teaches a man to save the word from becoming a catchword of politicians or a high-sounding name for greed. In the words of Fr. Kane: 'it draws its human fibres, fruit and flower, from the very roots of rational nature. It is elevated to supernatural

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strength, excellence and charm, by the grace of Christian holiness.'

In the present crisis, vague eulogies and superfluous ornamentation are not enough. To save the nation we must preserve the home and maintain the rights and duties of the family. Dishonour the home, break up family life, and you threaten the very existence of the State. True allegiance to the State is not weakened but strengthened by loyalty to the Church. The throne of His Majesty, King George, is made more secure by true Catholic submission to the King of Kings.

Are we Catholics bad patriots for affirming that the first debt we owe to our country must be paid to our God! That the highest service any man can render to England is the service of Faith?

There is only one deathless patriotism, and that is the patriotism of Godliness. Without faith and godliness, the State is pillared rottenness and its base built on stubble. Mere mechanical progress will but hasten our doom if there be no spiritual progress. The discoveries of the scientists will only help us in the light of the miracles of the Sanctuary. Our members of Parliament must see to it that the House of Commons does not take precedence over the House of God. True patriotism will not accord to anything or anyone a homage it denies to God. In the midst of our complex difficulties, our patriotism must have one meaning and one Master.

The dragon I take to be an emblematical figure representing evil of any kind. St. Michael, St. Margaret, St. Silvester and St. Martha are all depicted as slaying dragons, and St. John the Evangelist as charming a winged dragon from a poisoned chalice.

There are those, of course, who deny the existence of any dragon. Nothing to them is evil. A modern writer or a gloomy cleric will sometimes claim to have slain him, just as inconspicuous figures came from the

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rear claiming to have won the War; but they do not tell us what they have done with the body and there is much evidence that it is still very vital. In England it has been nourished since the Reformation by every form of negation and it poisons our literature, our mentality and our life with the fetid breath of pessimism.

It is high time that a crusade was called to slay it in the name of God, Our Lady and St. George. We are reaping the harvest of the dreary seed sown by Luther, Calvin and the Puritans. The harvest of these and kindred gloomy religions is a depressing thing. Only the religion of St. George will re-establish a Merrie England, for joyousness and hope are based on certitude in regard to things that matter. Hope becomes possible to the man who can 'see the invisible.' There is a very close relation between faith and hope, as there is between *the* Faith and a glorious future for England. In the midst of the gloom, we must build to the glory of God, never doubting. We must wrest victory from defeat in the midst of a desolate material outlook. That outlook may appear as dreary as did those few desolate sand lagoons off the Paduan coast of Italy at the beginning of the Christian era. But just as on that barren situation the Italians built the gleaming city of Venice; just as St. Mark's rose resplendent on a deserted shore, so with hope and certitude can English Catholics help to rebuild their beloved land as God would have it.

There are wise men looking for such a land and many thousands in whose hearts may be found not despondency, but rather the echo of the angels' song, 'Fear not. I bring you tidings of great joy.'

We English Catholics love our native land: it contains our kindred and our friends. Here we have learned all we know of pleasure, pain, home and religion. We are members of the human race, but we live in families: we would fulfil our obligations at the ends

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of the earth, but we love best our native soil. We are patriots for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, in national glory or decline. We believe that our religion is not alien because Catholic. If we said any other, the very stones would cry out against us. We should be confronted by a great host of witnesses, priests like St. Augustine, kings like Alfred, Edward the Confessor, and Richard, and a great multitude of the common people who lived and died Catholic Englishmen.

We believe in England and in the future of England, else why should we daily pray :

'O Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our most gentle Queen and Mother, look down in mercy upon England, thy Dowry'?

A. J. FRANCIS STANTON.