

## **IX NATIONALITY AND THE FRENCH WARS**

If any one wishes to know what we mean when we say that Christendom was and is one culture, or one civilization, there is a rough but plain way of putting it. It is by asking what is the most common, or rather the most commonplace, of all the uses of the word "Christian." There is, of course, the highest use of all; but it has nowadays many other uses. Sometimes a Christian means an Evangelical. Sometimes, and more recently, a Christian means a Quaker. Sometimes a Christian means a modest person who believes that he bears a resemblance to Christ. But it has long had one meaning in casual speech among common people, and it means a culture or a civilization. Ben Gunn on Treasure Island did not actually say to Jim Hawkins, "I feel myself out of touch with a certain type of civilization"; but he did say, "I haven't tasted Christian food." The old wives in a village looking at a lady with short hair and trousers do not indeed say, "We perceive a divergence between her culture and our own"; but they do say, "Why can't she dress like a Christian?" That the sentiment has thus soaked down to the simplest and even stupidest daily talk is but one evidence that Christendom was a very real thing. But it was also, as we have seen, a very localized thing, especially in the Middle Ages. And that very lively localism the Christian faith and affections encouraged led at last to an excessive and exclusive parochialism. There were rival shrines of the same saint, and a sort of duel between two statues of the same divinity. By a process it is now our difficult duty to follow, a real estrangement between European peoples began. Men began to feel that foreigners did not eat or drink like Christians, and even, when the philosophic schism came, to doubt if they were Christians.

There was, indeed, much more than this involved. While the internal structure of mediævalism was thus parochial and largely popular, in the greater affairs, and especially the external affairs, such as peace and war, most (though by no means all) of what was mediæval was monarchical. To see what the kings came to mean we must glance back at the great background, as of darkness and daybreak, against which the first figures of our history have already appeared. That background was the war with the barbarians. While it lasted Christendom was not only one nation but more like one city--and a besieged city. Wessex was but one wall or Paris one tower of it; and in one tongue and spirit Bede might have chronicled the siege of Paris or Abbo sung the song of Alfred. What followed was a conquest and a conversion; all the end of the Dark Ages and the dawn of mediævalism is full of the evangelizing of barbarism. And it is the paradox of the Crusades that though the Saracen was superficially more civilized than the Christian, it was a sound instinct which saw him also to be in spirit a destroyer. In the simpler case of northern heathenry the civilization spread with a simpler

progress. But it was not till the end of the Middle Ages, and close on the Reformation, that the people of Prussia, the wild land lying beyond Germany, were baptized at all. A flippant person, if he permitted himself a profane confusion with vaccination, might almost be inclined to suggest that for some reason it didn't "take" even then.

The barbarian peril was thus brought under bit by bit, and even in the case of Islam the alien power which could not be crushed was evidently curbed. The Crusades became hopeless, but they also became needless. As these fears faded the princes of Europe, who had come together to face them, were left facing each other. They had more leisure to find that their own captaincies clashed; but this would easily have been overruled, or would have produced a petty riot, had not the true creative spontaneity, of which we have spoken in the local life, tended to real variety. Royalties found they were representatives almost without knowing it; and many a king insisting on a genealogical tree or a title-deed found he spoke for the forests and the songs of a whole country-side. In England especially the transition is typified in the accident which raised to the throne one of the noblest men of the Middle Ages.

Edward I. came clad in all the splendours of his epoch. He had taken the Cross and fought the Saracens; he had been the only worthy foe of Simon de Montfort in those baronial wars which, as we have seen, were the first sign (however faint) of a serious theory that England should be ruled by its barons rather than its kings. He proceeded, like Simon de Montfort, and more solidly, to develop the great mediæval institution of a parliament. As has been said, it was superimposed on the existing parish democracies, and was first merely the summoning of local representatives to advise on local taxation. Indeed its rise was one with the rise of what we now call taxation; and there is thus a thread of theory leading to its latter claims to have the sole right of taxing. But in the beginning it was an instrument of the most equitable kings, and notably an instrument of Edward I. He often quarrelled with his parliaments and may sometimes have displeased his people (which has never been at all the same thing), but on the whole he was supremely the representative sovereign. In this connection one curious and difficult question may be considered here, though it marks the end of a story that began with the Norman Conquest. It is pretty certain that he was never more truly a representative king, one might say a republican king, than in the fact that he expelled the Jews. The problem is so much misunderstood and mixed with notions of a stupid spite against a gifted and historic race as such, that we must pause for a paragraph upon it.

The Jews in the Middle Ages were as powerful as they were unpopular. They were the capitalists of the age, the men with wealth banked ready for use. It is very tenable that in this way they were useful; it is certain that in this way they were

used. It is also quite fair to say that in this way they were ill-used. The ill-usage was not indeed that suggested at random in romances, which mostly revolve on the one idea that their teeth were pulled out. Those who know this as a story about King John generally do not know the rather important fact that it was a story against King John. It is probably doubtful; it was only insisted on as exceptional; and it was, by that very insistence, obviously regarded as disreputable. But the real unfairness of the Jews' position was deeper and more distressing to a sensitive and highly civilized people. They might reasonably say that Christian kings and nobles, and even Christian popes and bishops, used for Christian purposes (such as the Crusades and the cathedrals) the money that could only be accumulated in such mountains by a usury they inconsistently denounced as unchristian; and then, when worse times came, gave up the Jew to the fury of the poor, whom that useful usury had ruined. That was the real case for the Jew; and no doubt he really felt himself oppressed. Unfortunately it was the case for the Christians that they, with at least equal reason, felt him as the oppressor; and that mutual charge of tyranny is the Semitic trouble in all times. It is certain that in popular sentiment, this Anti-Semitism was not excused as uncharitableness, but simply regarded as charity. Chaucer puts his curse on Hebrew cruelty into the mouth of the soft-hearted prioress, who wept when she saw a mouse in a trap; and it was when Edward, breaking the rule by which the rulers had hitherto fostered their bankers' wealth, flung the alien financiers out of the land, that his people probably saw him most plainly at once as a knight errant and a tender father of his people.

Whatever the merits of this question, such a portrait of Edward was far from false. He was the most just and conscientious type of mediæval monarch; and it is exactly this fact that brings into relief the new force which was to cross his path and in strife with which he died. While he was just, he was also eminently legal. And it must be remembered, if we would not merely read back ourselves into the past, that much of the dispute of the time was legal; the adjustment of dynastic and feudal differences not yet felt to be anything else. In this spirit Edward was asked to arbitrate by the rival claimants to the Scottish crown; and in this sense he seems to have arbitrated quite honestly. But his legal, or, as some would say, pedantic mind made the proviso that the Scottish king as such was already under his suzerainty, and he probably never understood the spirit he called up against him; for that spirit had as yet no name. We call it to-day Nationalism. Scotland resisted; and the adventures of an outlawed knight named Wallace soon furnished it with one of those legends which are more important than history. In a way that was then at least equally practical, the Catholic priests of Scotland became especially the patriotic and Anti-English party; as indeed they remained even throughout the Reformation. Wallace was defeated and executed; but the heather was already on fire; and the espousal of the new national cause by one of Edward's own knights named Bruce, seemed to the old

king a mere betrayal of feudal equity. He died in a final fury at the head of a new invasion upon the very border of Scotland. With his last words the great king commanded that his bones should be borne in front of the battle; and the bones, which were of gigantic size, were eventually buried with the epitaph, "Here lies Edward the Tall, who was the hammer of the Scots." It was a true epitaph, but in a sense exactly opposite to its intention. He was their hammer, but he did not break but make them; for he smote them on an anvil and he forged them into a sword.

That coincidence or course of events, which must often be remarked in this story, by which (for whatever reason) our most powerful kings did not somehow leave their power secure, showed itself in the next reign, when the baronial quarrels were resumed and the northern kingdom, under Bruce, cut itself finally free by the stroke of Bannockburn. Otherwise the reign is a mere interlude, and it is with the succeeding one that we find the new national tendency yet further developed. The great French wars, in which England won so much glory, were opened by Edward III., and grew more and more nationalist. But even to feel the transition of the time we must first realize that the third Edward made as strictly legal and dynastic a claim to France as the first Edward had made to Scotland; the claim was far weaker in substance, but it was equally conventional in form. He thought, or said, he had a claim on a kingdom as a squire might say he had a claim on an estate; superficially it was an affair for the English and French lawyers. To read into this that the people were sheep bought and sold is to misunderstand all mediæval history; sheep have no trade union. The English arms owed much of their force to the class of the free yeomen; and the success of the infantry, especially of the archery, largely stood for that popular element which had already unhorsed the high French chivalry at Courtrai. But the point is this; that while the lawyers were talking about the Salic Law, the soldiers, who would once have been talking about guild law or glebe law, were already talking about English law and French law. The French were first in this tendency to see something outside the township, the trade brotherhood, the feudal dues, or the village common. The whole history of the change can be seen in the fact that the French had early begun to call the nation the Greater Land. France was the first of nations and has remained the norm of nations, the only one which is a nation and nothing else. But in the collision the English grew equally corporate; and a true patriotic applause probably hailed the victories of Crecy and Poitiers, as it certainly hailed the later victory of Agincourt. The latter did not indeed occur until after an interval of internal revolutions in England, which will be considered on a later page; but as regards the growth of nationalism, the French wars were continuous. And the English tradition that followed after Agincourt was continuous also. It is embodied in rude and spirited ballads before the great Elizabethans. The Henry V. of Shakespeare is not indeed the Henry V. of history; yet he is more historic. He is not only a saner and more genial but a more

important person. For the tradition of the whole adventure was not that of Henry, but of the populace who turned Henry into Harry. There were a thousand Harries in the army at Agincourt, and not one. For the figure that Shakespeare framed out of the legends of the great victory is largely the figure that all men saw as the Englishman of the Middle Ages. He did not really talk in poetry, like Shakespeare's hero, but he would have liked to. Not being able to do so, he sang; and the English people principally appear in contemporary impressions as the singing people. They were evidently not only expansive but exaggerative; and perhaps it was not only in battle that they drew the long bow. That fine farcical imagery, which has descended to the comic songs and common speech of the English poor even to-day, had its happy infancy when England thus became a nation; though the modern poor, under the pressure of economic progress, have partly lost the gaiety and kept only the humour. But in that early April of patriotism the new unity of the State still sat lightly upon them; and a cobbler in Henry's army, who would at home have thought first that it was the day of St. Crispin of the Cobblers, might truly as well as sincerely have hailed the splintering of the French lances in a storm of arrows, and cried, "St. George for Merry England."

Human things are uncomfortably complex, and while it was the April of patriotism it was the Autumn of mediæval society. In the next chapter I shall try to trace the forces that were disintegrating the civilization; and even here, after the first victories, it is necessary to insist on the bitterness and barren ambition that showed itself more and more in the later stages, as the long French wars dragged on. France was at the time far less happy than England--wasted by the treason of its nobles and the weakness of its kings almost as much as by the invasion of the islanders. And yet it was this very despair and humiliation that seemed at last to rend the sky, and let in the light of what it is hard for the coldest historian to call anything but a miracle.

It may be this apparent miracle that has apparently made Nationalism eternal. It may be conjectured, though the question is too difficult to be developed here, that there was something in the great moral change which turned the Roman Empire into Christendom, by which each great thing, to which it afterwards gave birth, was baptized into a promise, or at least into a hope of permanence. It may be that each of its ideas was, as it were, mixed with immortality. Certainly something of this kind can be seen in the conception which turned marriage from a contract into a sacrament. But whatever the cause, it is certain that even for the most secular types of our own time their relation to their native land has become not contractual but sacramental. We may say that flags are rags, that frontiers are fictions, but the very men who have said it for half their lives are dying for a rag, and being rent in pieces for a fiction even as I write. When the battle-trumpet blew in 1914 modern humanity had grouped itself into nations almost before it

knew what it had done. If the same sound is heard a thousand years hence, there is no sign in the world to suggest to any rational man that humanity will not do exactly the same thing. But even if this great and strange development be not enduring, the point is that it is felt as enduring. It is hard to give a definition of loyalty, but perhaps we come near it if we call it the thing which operates where an obligation is felt to be unlimited. And the minimum of duty or even decency asked of a patriot is the maximum that is asked by the most miraculous view of marriage. The recognized reality of patriotism is not mere citizenship. The recognized reality of patriotism is for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, in national growth and glory and in national disgrace and decline; it is not to travel in the ship of state as a passenger, but if need be to go down with the ship.

It is needless to tell here again the tale of that earthquake episode in which a clearance in the earth and sky, above the confusion and abasement of the crowns, showed the commanding figure of a woman of the people. She was, in her own living loneliness, a French Revolution. She was the proof that a certain power was not in the French kings or in the French knights, but in the French. But the fact that she saw something above her that was other than the sky, the fact that she lived the life of a saint and died the death of a martyr, probably stamped the new national sentiment with a sacred seal. And the fact that she fought for a defeated country, and, even though it was victorious, was herself ultimately defeated, defines that darker element of devotion of which I spoke above, which makes even pessimism consistent with patriotism. It is more appropriate in this place to consider the ultimate reaction of this sacrifice upon the romance and the realities of England.

I have never counted it a patriotic part to plaster my own country with conventional and unconvincing compliments; but no one can understand England who does not understand that such an episode as this, in which she was so clearly in the wrong, has yet been ultimately linked up with a curious quality in which she is rather unusually in the right. No one candidly comparing us with other countries can say we have specially failed to build the sepulchres of the prophets we stoned, or even the prophets who stoned us. The English historical tradition has at least a loose large-mindedness which always finally falls into the praise not only of great foreigners but great foes. Often along with much injustice it has an illogical generosity; and while it will dismiss a great people with mere ignorance, it treats a great personality with hearty hero-worship. There are more examples than one even in this chapter, for our books may well make out Wallace a better man than he was, as they afterwards assigned to Washington an even better cause than he had. Thackeray smiled at Miss Jane Porter's picture of Wallace, going into war weeping with a cambric pocket-handkerchief; but her attitude was more English and not less accurate. For her idealization was, if

anything, nearer the truth than Thackeray's own notion of a mediævalism of hypocritical hogs-in-armour. Edward, who figures as a tyrant, could weep with compassion; and it is probable enough that Wallace wept, with or without a pocket-handkerchief. Moreover, her romance was a reality, the reality of nationalism; and she knew much more about the Scottish patriots ages before her time than Thackeray did about the Irish patriots immediately under his nose. Thackeray was a great man; but in that matter he was a very small man, and indeed an invisible one. The cases of Wallace and Washington and many others are here only mentioned, however, to suggest an eccentric magnanimity which surely balances some of our prejudices. We have done many foolish things, but we have at least done one fine thing; we have whitewashed our worst enemies. If we have done this for a bold Scottish raider and a vigorous Virginian slave-holder, it may at least show that we are not likely to fail in our final appreciation of the one white figure in the motley processions of war. I believe there to be in modern England something like a universal enthusiasm on this subject. We have seen a great English critic write a book about this heroine, in opposition to a great French critic, solely in order to blame him for not having praised her enough. And I do not believe there lives an Englishman now, who if he had the offer of being an Englishman then, would not discard his chance of riding as the crowned conqueror at the head of all the spears of Agincourt, if he could be that English common soldier of whom tradition tells that he broke his spear asunder to bind it into a cross for Joan of Arc.