

XII SPAIN AND THE SCHISM OF NATIONS

The revolution that arose out of what is called the Renaissance, and ended in some countries in what is called the Reformation, did in the internal politics of England one drastic and definite thing. That thing was destroying the institutions of the poor. It was not the only thing it did, but it was much the most practical. It was the basis of all the problems now connected with Capital and Labour. How much the theological theories of the time had to do with it is a perfectly fair matter for difference of opinion. But neither party, if educated about the facts, will deny that the same time and temper which produced the religious schism also produced this new lawlessness in the rich. The most extreme Protestant will probably be content to say that Protestantism was not the motive, but the mask. The most extreme Catholic will probably be content to admit that Protestantism was not the sin, but rather the punishment. The most sweeping and shameless part of the process was not complete, indeed, until the end of the eighteenth century, when Protestantism was already passing into scepticism. Indeed a very decent case could be made out for the paradox that Puritanism was first and last a veneer on Paganism; that the thing began in the inordinate thirst for new things in the noblesse of the Renaissance and ended in the Hell-Fire Club. Anyhow, what was first founded at the Reformation was a new and abnormally powerful aristocracy, and what was destroyed, in an ever-increasing degree, was everything that could be held, directly or indirectly, by the people in spite of such an aristocracy. This fact has filled all the subsequent history of our country; but the next particular point in that history concerns the position of the Crown. The King, in reality, had already been elbowed aside by the courtiers who had crowded behind him just before the bursting of the door. The King is left behind in the rush for wealth, and already can do nothing alone. And of this fact the next reign, after the chaos of Edward VI.'s, affords a very arresting proof.

Mary Tudor, daughter of the divorced Queen Katherine, has a bad name even in popular history; and popular prejudice is generally more worthy of study than scholarly sophistry. Her enemies were indeed largely wrong about her character, but they were not wrong about her effect. She was, in the limited sense, a good woman, convinced, conscientious, rather morbid. But it is true that she was a bad queen; bad for many things, but especially bad for her own most beloved cause. It is true, when all is said, that she set herself to burn out "No Popery" and managed to burn it in. The concentration of her fanaticism into cruelty, especially its concentration in particular places and in a short time, did remain like something red-hot in the public memory. It was the first of the series of great historical accidents that separated a real, if not universal, public opinion from the old régime. It has been summarized in the death by fire of the three famous

martyrs at Oxford; for one of them at least, Latimer, was a reformer of the more robust and human type, though another of them, Cranmer, had been so smooth a snob and coward in the councils of Henry VIII. as to make Thomas Cromwell seem by comparison a man. But of what may be called the Latimer tradition, the saner and more genuine Protestantism, I shall speak later. At the time even the Oxford Martyrs probably produced less pity and revulsion than the massacre in the flames of many more obscure enthusiasts, whose very ignorance and poverty made their cause seem more popular than it really was. But this last ugly feature was brought into sharper relief, and produced more conscious or unconscious bitterness, because of that other great fact of which I spoke above, which is the determining test of this time of transition.

What made all the difference was this: that even in this Catholic reign the property of the Catholic Church could not be restored. The very fact that Mary was a fanatic, and yet this act of justice was beyond the wildest dreams of fanaticism--that is the point. The very fact that she was angry enough to commit wrongs for the Church, and yet not bold enough to ask for the rights of the Church--that is the test of the time. She was allowed to deprive small men of their lives, she was not allowed to deprive great men of their property--or rather of other people's property. She could punish heresy, she could not punish sacrilege. She was forced into the false position of killing men who had not gone to church, and sparing men who had gone there to steal the church ornaments. What forced her into it? Not certainly her own religious attitude, which was almost maniacally sincere; not public opinion, which had naturally much more sympathy for the religious humanities which she did not restore than for the religious inhumanities which she did. The force came, of course, from the new nobility and the new wealth they refused to surrender; and the success of this early pressure proves that the nobility was already stronger than the Crown. The sceptre had only been used as a crowbar to break open the door of a treasure-house, and was itself broken, or at least bent, with the blow.

There is a truth also in the popular insistence on the story of Mary having "Calais" written on her heart, when the last relic of the mediæval conquests reverted to France. Mary had the solitary and heroic half-virtue of the Tudors: she was a patriot. But patriots are often pathetically behind the times; for the very fact that they dwell on old enemies often blinds them to new ones. In a later generation Cromwell exhibited the same error reversed, and continued to keep a hostile eye on Spain when he should have kept it on France. In our own time the Jingoës of Fashoda kept it on France when they ought already to have had it on Germany. With no particular anti-national intention, Mary nevertheless got herself into an anti-national position towards the most tremendous international problem of her people. It is the second of the coincidences that confirmed the sixteenth-century change, and the name of it was Spain. The daughter of a

Spanish queen, she married a Spanish prince, and probably saw no more in such an alliance than her father had done. But by the time she was succeeded by her sister Elizabeth, who was more cut off from the old religion (though very tenuously attached to the new one), and by the time the project of a similar Spanish marriage for Elizabeth herself had fallen through, something had matured which was wider and mightier than the plots of princes. The Englishman, standing on his little island as on a lonely boat, had already felt falling across him the shadow of a tall ship.

Wooden clichés about the birth of the British Empire and the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth have not merely obscured but contradicted the crucial truth. From such phrases one would fancy that England, in some imperial fashion, now first realized that she was great. It would be far truer to say that she now first realized that she was small. The great poet of the spacious days does not praise her as spacious, but only as small, like a jewel. The vision of universal expansion was wholly veiled until the eighteenth century; and even when it came it was far less vivid and vital than what came in the sixteenth. What came then was not Imperialism; it was Anti-Imperialism. England achieved, at the beginning of her modern history, that one thing human imagination will always find heroic--the story of a small nationality. The business of the Armada was to her what Bannockburn was to the Scots, or Majuba to the Boers--a victory that astonished even the victors. What was opposed to them was Imperialism in its complete and colossal sense, a thing unthinkable since Rome. It was, in no overstrained sense, civilization itself. It was the greatness of Spain that was the glory of England. It is only when we realize that the English were, by comparison, as dingy, as undeveloped, as petty and provincial as Boers, that we can appreciate the height of their defiance or the splendour of their escape. We can only grasp it by grasping that for a great part of Europe the cause of the Armada had almost the cosmopolitan common sense of a crusade. The Pope had declared Elizabeth illegitimate--logically, it is hard to see what else he could say, having declared her mother's marriage invalid; but the fact was another and perhaps a final stroke sundering England from the elder world. Meanwhile those picturesque English privateers who had plagued the Spanish Empire of the New World were spoken of in the South simply as pirates, and technically the description was true; only technical assaults by the weaker party are in retrospect rightly judged with some generous weakness. Then, as if to stamp the contrast in an imperishable image, Spain, or rather the empire with Spain for its centre, put forth all its strength, and seemed to cover the sea with a navy like the legendary navy of Xerxes. It bore down on the doomed island with the weight and solemnity of a day of judgment; sailors or pirates struck at it with small ships staggering under large cannon, fought it with mere masses of flaming rubbish, and in that last hour of grapple a great storm arose out of the sea and swept round the island, and the gigantic fleet was seen no more. The uncanny completeness and abrupt silence that

swallowed this prodigy touched a nerve that has never ceased to vibrate. The hope of England dates from that hopeless hour, for there is no real hope that has not once been a forlorn hope. The breaking of that vast naval net remained like a sign that the small thing which escaped would survive the greatness. And yet there is truly a sense in which we may never be so small or so great again.

For the splendour of the Elizabethan age, which is always spoken of as a sunrise, was in many ways a sunset. Whether we regard it as the end of the Renaissance or the end of the old mediæval civilization, no candid critic can deny that its chief glories ended with it. Let the reader ask himself what strikes him specially in the Elizabethan magnificence, and he will generally find it is something of which there were at least traces in mediæval times, and far fewer traces in modern times. The Elizabethan drama is like one of its own tragedies--its tempestuous torch was soon to be trodden out by the Puritans. It is needless to say that the chief tragedy was the cutting short of the comedy; for the comedy that came to England after the Restoration was by comparison both foreign and frigid. At the best it is comedy in the sense of being humorous, but not in the sense of being happy. It may be noted that the givers of good news and good luck in the Shakespearian love-stories nearly all belong to a world which was passing, whether they are friars or fairies. It is the same with the chief Elizabethan ideals, often embodied in the Elizabethan drama. The national devotion to the Virgin Queen must not be wholly discredited by its incongruity with the coarse and crafty character of the historical Elizabeth. Her critics might indeed reasonably say that in replacing the Virgin Mary by the Virgin Queen, the English reformers merely exchanged a true virgin for a false one. But this truth does not dispose of a true, though limited, contemporary cult. Whatever we think of that particular Virgin Queen, the tragic heroines of the time offer us a whole procession of virgin queens. And it is certain that the mediævals would have understood much better than the moderns the martyrdom of Measure for Measure. And as with the title of Virgin, so with the title of Queen. The mystical monarchy glorified in Richard II. was soon to be dethroned much more ruinously than in Richard II. The same Puritans who tore off the pasteboard crowns of the stage players were also to tear off the real crowns of the kings whose parts they played. All mummery was to be forbidden, and all monarchy to be called mummery.

Shakespeare died upon St. George's Day, and much of what St. George had meant died with him. I do not mean that the patriotism of Shakespeare or of England died; that remained and even rose steadily, to be the noblest pride of the coming times. But much more than patriotism had been involved in that image of St. George to whom the Lion Heart had dedicated England long ago in the deserts of Palestine. The conception of a patron saint had carried from the Middle Ages one very unique and as yet unreplaced idea. It was the idea of variation without antagonism. The Seven Champions of Christendom were multiplied by seventy

times seven in the patrons of towns, trades and social types; but the very idea that they were all saints excluded the possibility of ultimate rivalry in the fact that they were all patrons. The Guild of the Shoemakers and the Guild of the Skinners, carrying the badges of St. Crispin and St. Bartholomew, might fight each other in the streets; but they did not believe that St. Crispin and St. Bartholomew were fighting each other in the skies. Similarly the English would cry in battle on St. George and the French on St. Denis; but they did not seriously believe that St. George hated St. Denis or even those who cried upon St. Denis. Joan of Arc, who was on the point of patriotism what many modern people would call very fanatical, was yet upon this point what most modern people would call very enlightened. Now, with the religious schism, it cannot be denied, a deeper and more inhuman division appeared. It was no longer a scrap between the followers of saints who were themselves at peace, but a war between the followers of gods who were themselves at war. That the great Spanish ships were named after St. Francis or St. Philip was already beginning to mean little to the new England; soon it was to mean something almost cosmically conflicting, as if they were named after Baal or Thor. These are indeed mere symbols; but the process of which they are symbols was very practical and must be seriously followed. There entered with the religious wars the idea which modern science applies to racial wars; the idea of natural wars, not arising from a special quarrel but from the nature of the people quarrelling. The shadow of racial fatalism first fell across our path, and far away in distance and darkness something moved that men had almost forgotten.

Beyond the frontiers of the fading Empire lay that outer land, as loose and drifting as a sea, which had boiled over in the barbarian wars. Most of it was now formally Christian, but barely civilized; a faint awe of the culture of the south and west lay on its wild forces like a light frost. This semi-civilized world had long been asleep; but it had begun to dream. In the generation before Elizabeth a great man who, with all his violence, was vitally a dreamer, Martin Luther, had cried out in his sleep in a voice like thunder, partly against the place of bad customs, but largely also against the place of good works in the Christian scheme. In the generation after Elizabeth the spread of the new wild doctrines in the old wild lands had sucked Central Europe into a cyclic war of creeds. In this the house which stood for the legend of the Holy Roman Empire, Austria, the Germanic partner of Spain, fought for the old religion against a league of other Germans fighting for the new. The continental conditions were indeed complicated, and grew more and more complicated as the dream of restoring religious unity receded. They were complicated by the firm determination of France to be a nation in the full modern sense; to stand free and foursquare from all combinations; a purpose which led her, while hating her own Protestants at home, to give diplomatic support to many Protestants abroad, simply because it preserved the balance of power against the gigantic confederation of Spaniards

and Austrians. It is complicated by the rise of a Calvinistic and commercial power in the Netherlands, logical, defiant, defending its own independence valiantly against Spain. But on the whole we shall be right if we see the first throes of the modern international problems in what is called the Thirty Years' War; whether we call it the revolt of half-heathens against the Holy Roman Empire, or whether we call it the coming of new sciences, new philosophies, and new ethics from the north. Sweden took a hand in the struggle, and sent a military hero to the help of the newer Germany. But the sort of military heroism everywhere exhibited offered a strange combination of more and more complex strategic science with the most naked and cannibal cruelty. Other forces besides Sweden found a career in the carnage. Far away to the north-east, in a sterile land of fens, a small ambitious family of money-lenders who had become squires, vigilant, thrifty, thoroughly selfish, rather thinly adopted the theories of Luther, and began to lend their almost savage hinds as soldiers on the Protestant side. They were well paid for it by step after step of promotion; but at this time their principality was only the old Mark of Brandenburg. Their own name was Hohenzollern.