

Chapter IX - The Awakening of England

In October 1912 silent and seemingly uninhabited crags and chasms in the high western region of the Balkans echoed and re-echoed with a single shot. It was fired by the hand of a king--real king, who sat listening to his people in front of his own house (for it was hardly a palace), and who, in consequence of his listening to the people, not unfrequently imprisoned the politicians. It is said of him that his great respect for Gladstone as the western advocate of Balkan freedom was slightly shadowed by the fact that Gladstone did not succeed in effecting the bodily capture of Jack the Ripper. This simple monarch knew that if a malefactor were the terror of the mountain hamlets, his subjects would expect him personally to take arms and pursue the ruffian; and if he refused to do so, would very probably experiment with another king. And the same primitive conception of a king being kept for some kind of purpose, led them also to expect him to lead in a foreign campaign, and it was with his own hand that he fired the first shot of the war which brought down into the dust the ancient empire of the Grand Turk.

His kingdom was little more than the black mountain after which it was named: we commonly refer to it under its Italian translation of Montenegro. It is worth while to pause for a moment upon his picturesque and peculiar community, because it is perhaps the simplest working model of all that stood in the path of the great Germanic social machine I have described in the last chapter--stood in its path and was soon to be very nearly destroyed by its onset. It was a branch of the Serbian stock which had climbed into this almost inaccessible eyrie, and thence, for many hundred years, had mocked at the predatory empire of the Turks. The Serbians in their turn were but one branch of the peasant Slavs, millions of whom are spread over Russia and subject on many sides to empires with which they have less sympathy; and the Slavs again, in the broad features which are important here, are not merely Slavonic but simply European. But a particular picture is generally more pointed and intelligible than tendencies which elsewhere are mingled with subtler tendencies; and of this unmixed European simplicity Montenegro is an excellent model.

Moreover, the instance of one small Christian State will serve to emphasise that this is not a quarrel between England and Germany, but between Europe and Germany. It is my whole purpose in these pages not to spare my own country where it is open to criticism; and I freely admit that Montenegro, morally and politically speaking, is almost as much in advance of England as it is of Germany. In Montenegro there are no millionaires--and therefore next to no Socialists. As to why there are no millionaires, it is a mystery, and best studied among the

mysteries of the Middle Ages. By some of the dark ingenuities of that age of priestcraft a curious thing was discovered--that if you kill every usurer, every forestaller, every adulterater, every user of false weights, every fixer of false boundaries, every land-thief, every water-thief, you afterwards discover by a strange indirect miracle, or disconnected truth from heaven, that you have no millionaires. Without dwelling further on this dark matter, we may say that this great gap in the Montenegrin experience explains the other great gap--the lack of Socialists. The Class-conscious Proletarian of All Lands is curiously absent from this land. The reason (I have sometimes fancied) is that the Proletarian is class-conscious, not because he is a Proletarian of All Lands, but because he is a Proletarian with no lands. The poor people in Montenegro have lands--not landlords. They have roots; for the peasant is the root of the priest, the poet, and the warrior. And this, and not a mere recrimination about acts of violence, is the ground of the age-long Balkan bitterness against the Turkish conqueror. Montenegrins are patriotic for Montenegro; but Turks are not patriotic for Turkey. They never heard of it, in fact. They are Bedouins, as homeless as the desert. The "wrong horse" of Lord Salisbury was an Arab steed, only stabled in Byzantium. It is hard enough to rule vagabond people, like the gypsies. To be ruled by them is impossible.

Nevertheless what was called the nineteenth century, and named with a sort of transcendental faith (as in a Pythagorean worship of number), was wearing to its close with reaction everywhere, and the Turk, the great type of reaction, stronger than ever in the saddle. The most civilised of the Christian nations overshadowed by the Crescent dared to attack it and was overwhelmed in a catastrophe that seemed as unanswerable as Hittin. In England Gladstone and Gladstonism were dead; and Mr. Kipling, a less mystical Carlyle, was expending a type of praise upon the British Army which would have been even more appropriate to the Prussian Army. The Prussian Army ruled Prussia; Prussia ruled Germany; Germany ruled the Concert of Europe. She was planting everywhere the appliances of that new servile machinery which was her secret; the absolute identification of national subordination with business employment; so that Krupp could count on Kaiser and Kaiser on Krupp. Every other commercial traveller was pathetically proud of being both a slave and a spy. The old and the new tyrants had taken hands. The "sack" of the boss was as silent and fatal as the sack of the Bosphorus. And the dream of the citizen was at an end.

It was under a sky so leaden and on a road so strewn with bones that the little mountain democracy with its patriarchal prince went out, first and before all its friends, on the last and seemingly the most hopeless of the rebellions against the Ottoman Empire. Only one of the omens seemed other than disastrous; and even that was doubtful. For the successful Mediterranean attack on Tripoli while proving the gallantry of the Italians (if that ever needed proving) could be taken in

two ways, and was seen by many, and probably most, sincere liberals as a mere extension of the Imperialist reaction of Bosnia and Paardeberg, and not as the promise of newer things. Italy, it must be remembered, was still supposed to be the partner of Prussia and the Hapsburgs. For days that seemed like months the microscopic state seemed to be attempting alone what the Crusades had failed to accomplish. And for days Europe and the great powers were thunderstruck, again and yet again, by the news of Turkish forts falling, Turkish cohorts collapsing, the unconquerable Crescent going down in blood. The Serbians, the Bulgarians, the Greeks had gathered and risen from their lairs; and men knew that these peasants had done what all the politicians had long despaired of doing, and that the spirit of the first Christian Emperor was already standing over the city that is named after his name.

For Germany this quite unexpected rush was a reversal of the whole tide of the world. It was as if the Rhine itself had returned from the ocean and retired into the Alps. For a long time past every important political process in Europe had been produced or permitted by Prussia. She had pulled down ministers in France and arrested reforms in Russia. Her ruler was acclaimed by Englishmen like Rhodes, and Americans like Roosevelt, as the great prince of the age. One of the most famous and brilliant of our journalists called him "the Lord Chief Justice of Europe." He was the strongest man in Christendom; and he had confirmed and consecrated the Crescent. And when he had consecrated it a few hill tribes had risen and trampled it like mire. One or two other things about the same time, less important in themselves, struck in the Prussian's ear the same new note of warning and doubt. He sought to obtain a small advantage on the north-west coast of Africa; and England seemed to show a certain strange stiffness in insisting on its abandonment. In the councils over Morocco, England agreed with France with what did not seem altogether an accidental agreement. But we shall not be wrong if we put the crucial point of the German surprise and anger at the attack from the Balkans and the fall of Adrianople. Not only did it menace the key of Asia and the whole Eastern dream of German commerce; not only did it offer the picture of one army trained by France and victorious, and another army trained by Germany and beaten. There was more than the material victory of the Creusot over the Krupp gun. It was also the victory of the peasant's field over the Krupp factory. By this time there was in the North German brain an awful inversion of all the legends and heroic lives that the human race has loved. Prussia hated romance. Chivalry was not a thing she neglected; it was a thing that tormented her as any bully is tormented by an unanswered challenge. That weird process was completed of which I have spoken on an earlier page, whereby the soul of this strange people was everywhere on the side of the dragon against the knight, of the giant against the hero. Anything unexpected--the forlorn hopes, the eleventh-hour inspirations, by which the weak can elude the strong, and which take the hearts of happier men like trumpets--filled the Prussian with a

cold fury, as of a frustrated fate. The Prussian felt as a Chicago pork butcher would feel if the pigs not only refused to pass through his machine, but turned into romantic wild boars, raging and rending, calling for the old hunting of princes and fit to be the crests of kings.

The Prussian saw these things and his mind was made up. He was silent; but he laboured: laboured for three long years without intermission at the making of a military machine that should cut out of the world for ever such romantic accident or random adventure; a machine that should cure the human pigs for ever of any illusion that they had wings. That he did so plot and prepare for an attack that should come from him, anticipating and overwhelming any resistance, is now, even in the documents he has himself published, a fact of common sense. Suppose a man sells all his lands except a small yard containing a well; suppose in the division of the effects of an old friend he particularly asks for his razors; suppose when a corded trunk is sent him he sends back the trunk, but keeps the cord. And then suppose we hear that a rival of his has been lassoed with a rope, his throat then cut, apparently with a razor, and his body hidden in a well, we do not call in Sherlock Holmes to project a preliminary suspicion about the guilty party. In the discussions held by the Prussian Government with Lord Haldane and Sir Edward Grey we can now see quite as plainly the meaning of the things that were granted and the things that were withheld, the things that would have satisfied the Prussian plotter and the things that did not satisfy him. The German Chancellor refused an English promise not to be aggressive and asked instead for an English promise to be neutral. There is no meaning in the distinction, except in the mind of an aggressor. Germany proposed a pacific arrangement which forbade England to form a fighting alliance with France, but permitted Germany to retain her old fighting alliance with Austria. When the hour of war came she used Austria, used the old fighting alliance and tried to use the new idea of English neutrality. That is to say, she used the rope, the razor, and the well.

But it was either by accident or by individual diplomatic skill that England at the end of the three years even had her own hands free to help in frustrating the German plot. The mass of the English people had no notion of such a plot; and indeed regarded the occasional suggestion of it as absurd. Nor did even the people who knew best know very much better. Thanks and even apologies are doubtless due to those who in the deepest lull of our sleeping partnership with Prussia saw her not as a partner but a potential enemy; such men as Mr. Blatchford, Mr. Bart Kennedy, or the late Emil Reich. But there is a distinction to be made. Few even of these, with the admirable and indeed almost magical exception of Dr. Sarolea, saw Germany as she was; occupied mainly with Europe and only incidentally with England; indeed, in the first stages, not occupied with England at all. Even the Anti-Germans were too insular. Even those who saw most of Germany's plan saw too much of England's part in it. They saw it almost

wholly as a commercial and colonial quarrel; and saw its issue under the image of an invasion of England, which is even now not very probable. This fear of Germany was indeed a very German fear of Germany. This also conceived the English as Sea-Germans. It conceived Germany as at war with something like itself--practical, prosaic, capitalist, competitive Germany, prepared to cut us up in battle as she cut us out in business. The time of our larger vision was not yet, when we should realise that Germany was more deeply at war with things quite unlike herself, things from which we also had sadly strayed. Then we should remember what we were and see whence we also had come; and far and high upon that mountain from which the Crescent was cast down, behold what was everywhere the real enemy of the Iron Cross--the peasant's cross, which is of wood.

Even our very slight ripples of panic, therefore, were provincial, and even shallow; and for the most part we were possessed and convinced of peace. That peace was not a noble one. We had indeed reached one of the lowest and flattest levels of all our undulating history; and it must be admitted that the contemptuous calculation with which Germany counted on our submission and abstention was not altogether unfounded, though it was, thank God, unfulfilled. The full fruition of our alliances against freedom had come. The meek acceptance of Kultur in our books and schools had stiffened what was once a free country with a German formalism and a German fear. By a queer irony, even the same popular writer who had already warned us against the Prussians, had sought to preach among the populace a very Prussian fatalism, pivoted upon the importance of the charlatan Haeckel. The wrestle of the two great parties had long slackened into an embrace. The fact was faintly denied, and a pretence was still made that no pact: existed beyond a common patriotism. But the pretence failed altogether; for it was evident that the leaders on either side, so far from leading in divergent directions, were much closer to each other than to their own followers. The power of these leaders had enormously increased; but the distance between them had diminished, or, rather, disappeared. It was said about 1800, in derision of the Foxite rump, that the Whig Party came down to Parliament in a four-wheeler. It might literally be said in 1900 that the Whig Party and the Tory Party came to Parliament in a hansom cab. It was not a case of two towers rising into different roofs or spires, but founded in the same soil. It was rather the case of an arch, of which the foundation-stones on either side might fancy they were two buildings; but the stones nearest the keystone would know there was only one. This "two-handed engine" still stood ready to strike, not, indeed, the other part of itself, but anyone who ventured to deny that it was doing so. We were ruled, as it were, by a Wonderland king and queen, who cut off our heads, not for saying they quarrelled but for saying they didn't. The libel law was now used, not to crush lies about private life, but to crush truths about public life. Representation had become mere misrepresentation; a maze of loopholes. This was mainly due to the

monstrous presence of certain secret moneys, on which alone many men could win the ruinous elections of the age, and which were contributed and distributed with less check or record than is tolerated in the lowest trade or club. Only one or two people attacked these funds; nobody defended them. Through them the great capitalists had the handle of politics, as of everything else. The poor were struggling hopelessly against rising prices; and their attempts at collective bargaining, by the collective refusal of badly-paid work, were discussed in the press, Liberal and Tory, as attacks upon the State. And so they were; upon the Servile State.

Such was the condition of England in 1914, when Prussia, now at last armed to the teeth and secure of triumph, stood up before the world, and solemnly, like one taking a sacrament, consecrated her campaign with a crime. She entered by a forbidden door, one which she had herself forbidden--marching upon France through neutralised Belgium, where every step was on her broken word. Her neutralised neighbours resisted, as indeed they, like ourselves, were pledged to do. Instantly the whole invasion was lit up with a flame of moral lunacy, that turned the watching nations white who had never known the Prussian. The statistics of non-combatants killed and tortured by this time only stun the imagination. But two friends of my own have been in villages sacked by the Prussian march. One saw a tabernacle containing the Sacrament patiently picked out in pattern by shot after shot. The other saw a rocking-horse and the wooden toys in a nursery laboriously hacked to pieces. Those two facts together will be enough to satisfy some of us of the name of the Spirit that had passed.

And then a strange thing happened. England, that had not in the modern sense any army at all, was justified of all her children. Respected institutions and reputations did indeed waver and collapse on many sides: though the chief of the states replied worthily to a bribe from the foreign bully, many other politicians were sufficiently wild and weak, though doubtless patriotic in intention. One was set to restrain the journalists, and had to be restrained himself, for being more sensational than any of them. Another scolded the working-classes in the style of an intoxicated temperance lecturer. But England was saved by a forgotten thing--the English. Simple men with simple motives, the chief one a hate of injustice which grows simpler the longer we stare at it, came out of their dreary tenements and their tidy shops, their fields and their suburbs and their factories and their rookeries, and asked for the arms of men. In a throng that was at last three million men, the islanders went forth from their island, as simply as the mountaineers had gone forth from their mountain, with their faces to the dawn.