

Sweet Reasonableness

*Originally published in the December
1915 edition of The International.*

(Mr. Aleister Crowley was once a subject of Great Britain. He is a member of Cambridge University and is considered by the foremost English critics to be one of England's finest poets. He approaches the subject of world peace as a poet does, laying especial stress upon those great spiritual virtues which unfortunately for mankind are not always practical in this very early earth. Frankly, we do not agree with Mr. Crowley. Nevertheless, his paper deserves the deepest consideration and presents a notable point of view, which is neither British, German, French nor any nationality, but manifestly one of high humanity and sweet reasonableness. – Editor.)

"The state of hate doth not abate by hate in any line or
clime,

"But hate will cease if love increase. So smoothly runs
the ancient rime"

— Dhammapada.

I.

The constant provocations and insults of Jimmie Hughes had at last driven little Willie Brown to retaliate. Tact had availed nothing, and protest had led only to fresh bullying. So little Willie Brown made up his mind to "bat him one."

"There stood the giant form of the cowardly aggressor, hulking, menacing, with a vile sneer upon his ugly face. Little Willie, a full foot shorter, stiffened all over. His jaw tightened; the lines of his face hardened, expressing resolution, courage and wrath righteous and

just, but altogether great, neither fierce nor violent, being gripped in the iron grasp of the sternest moral control. This was no merely human quarrel, no fight between two angry boys. There was much in the nature of divine chastisement in the coming battle. It was a long-suffering God, slow to anger and full of mercy, moved at last to execute justice, sorrowfully and without passion, but with severity most equitably proportioned to the heinousness of the offence.

"So Little Willie Brown struck Jimmie Hughes. The blow caught him on the jaw, which snapped like a rotten twig. Jimmie's teeth flew out in all directions like an exploding firework. The blood gushed out like a geyser. The giant's body swayed once, like some great oak in the tornado, then crashed to earth and stirred no more. Jimmie was dead. Little Willie Brown retrieved from his pockets the broken knife which had been the cause of the dispute, and returned to Sunday School with the proud consciousness of One More Painful Duty Done."

The shameful secret of the Universe must now be disclosed: the above is not a record of brutal materialistic fact; it is only the mental picture which Little Willie formulated when he made up his mind to "bat him one." It dazzled him, so much so, that after many repetitions, he was deluded into action. In this, as luck would have it, he was extremely successful. He caught Jimmie at a disadvantage, and the blow went home. But the bully's face was not very much damaged, and his own knuckles bled considerably. A regular fight developed, and by sheer gameness the little fellow beat the big one. But he had suffered a good deal; his eyes were blackened, his lip was cut, his clothes were torn; there would be a big reckoning with his mother by-and-by! And when Jimmie Hughes, pleading for peace, offered all in his power, it appeared that the broken knife had been lost in the struggle; and though they spent a long while looking for it together, it was never found.

II.

This is a pretty decent parable of nearly every war. The nation, taking its coat off, sees nothing but its own armed might, ably seconded by Jehovah or some other complacent and competent deity, striking its opponent to the earth. In six weeks it will be dictating peace in the other fellow's capital; it will extract an indemnity large enough to make all its citizens rich for life, and acquire new territory sufficient to make them all landed proprietors with the conquered foemen for serfs and vassals.

When this theory comes to proof, and declares itself as but a rosy dream, the cry goes up, "We are betrayed." This is quite true; but the traitor is the imagination, the mental disturbance caused by anger which has created the hallucination. This fever of the mind is constantly inflamed by every new incident of the war; the cheerfulness and depression between which sane human beings fluctuate become mania and melancholy respectively, by reason of the removal of the inhibitory functions of the brain. To speak of reason, right, justice, or even to give sound practical advice with regard to the organization of victory, is then as perfectly useless as it is to argue with a lunatic; the sanest comment is taken up and used for fuel by the burning brain.

And so contagious is this malady that in any one nation it is rare to find as many as a dozen men who retain any grasp of fact, any power to perceive truth.

Of course, the bulk of humanity is totally ignorant of that most important of all psychological facts, that emotion is a veil of perception. The Buddhist makes it the cardinal fact of his philosophy. To him the ego-idea is so powerful a bias that it prejudices him hopelessly in the search for truth, and in the observation of nature and of his own mind; and therefore this "delusion of personality" must be rooted out and burnt with fire before one can even enter upon the Path of Wisdom. It

follows that any inflammation of this disease creates delirium and the phantoms of delirium; and the whole body of the emotions, which "move out" and so heat the ego, is but an aggravation of the trouble. It needs Buddhist or some similar training, mute months of solitude and years of meditation, for the conquest of this evil dream, the ego. Only one who has done this is competent to observe the war.

Suppose the mere outbreak will destroy half his income, diminish the other half by two-thirds; let it also render his principal work impossible; he does not allow himself to be distressed. His friends are killed in battle; he is ill, starving, lonely in a great and heartless city; but he never feels the smallest thrill of indignation or excitement. He does not propose, with many of his esteemed contemporaries, to burn off one-half of the Kaiser's moustache, and exhibit him caged to the contempt of gaping peasants. He does not want to hang him, or shoot him, or send him to St. Helena. He does not believe that he personally directed the rape, torture, and mutilation of millions of aged Belgian heroines; he cannot imagine him dismissing his cook for serving him boiled baby at two consecutive breakfasts. Indeed, he thinks (to be frank at any cost) that the Kaiser is just as sane as he himself is, as coolly determined to save his country by force of arms as another might be to save his – and that might include Europe, Asia and Africa as well as Ireland – by force of thought; and feels perfectly sure that he knows that the only chance of success lies in keeping a cool head, and rather in concentrating the wits than in allowing the vehemence of passion to scatter them to the four winds of heaven.

He tells his friends that the Kaiser is a sane, clever man of courage and address, and that if they really wish to send him to St. Helena they had better cool off, and try to beat him at his own game.

They reply, "You are a damned swine of a pro-German; he is a furious madman, the king-epileptic of a

race of sadistic necrophiles." They have to talk in this medical way, because it no longer sounds sensible to say that a man you dislike is a devil from hell, as Procopius said of Justinian, and the English of Shelley, to take two examples; nor would it be very effective to call him an atheist, a wizard, or a heretic, except in certain small old-fashioned religious circles. The "educated" (God help us all!) have thrown off the religious superstition, but they are slaves to the pseudo-medical superstition; so if you disagree with anybody now-a-days about the color of a necktie you must call him a fetichist, or an algolagnist, or something else out of a manual of popular pathology.

But a sane observer is no longer susceptible to silly rages of this sort.

He detaches himself wholly from that which he observes. His temperature remains steadily at 98.4 degrees Centigrade; and if there be any symptoms of diseased imagination in any such person it is shown by this paper, in which it is proposed to try to convince a lot of escaped lunatics that they had better return quietly to the asylum.

III.

Both England and Germany at the beginning of the war were full of people like Little Willie Brown. The bombardment of Cuxhaven and Kiel and Heligoland was conceived of an edition de luxe of the bombardment of Alexandria in 1882. People remembered the sketches of that business in the illustrated weeklies from youth or childhood. The principal preparation necessary was the selection of the flags required for signaling "Well done, Condor!" or words to that effect.

Similarly, many people in Germany doubtless supposed that a Zeppelin had but to drop a bomb on London and it would ignite like a heap of shavings soaked in

paraffin. The French, having had their eyes opened in 1870 by the blows to the national ego, suffered from no such hallucinations, and the average Russian had, of course, no ideas at all.

However, war is a liberal education, and after a year of it most persons of intelligence perceive not only that there is going to be no walk-over, but that a decisive issue is almost impossible. Some cling to the idea that the continuous and increasing strain will lead to a climax in which something will snap suddenly; and indeed the unhappy plight of the Allies gives some color to the theory. But even in that favorable case, the collapse is probably not so complete as it appears.

Von Hindenburg will not care to have eight hundred miles of communications to maintain until he has built a maze of strategic railways to help him. Napoleon, who had beaten the Russian armies out of the field, was destroyed by forces little better than guerilla bands. The Germans, however, know Napoleon's campaign better than the Russians themselves. They will not repeat his blunders. A sweep through France seems ultimately less obtainable; but Joffe is yet unshaken. Indeed, the morale of his troops seems to have improved continually; and he had undoubtedly held enormous forces in reserve. Even the raw levies of the British may become serviceable as time goes on. Of course, there is the strong probability of a revolution in England, but, putting that aside, the Allies have held the western front throughout this year, and they are likely to do so next year. Germany cannot be beaten until her country is overrun by the Allies; and if she were invaded, every woman would become a Joan of Arc. The English have been so deluded by their debauched press that they cannot conceive the temper of the German people, or their moral strength. Their own hypocrisy compels them to attribute the same quality to their antagonists; they imagine that the German's oath to save the Fatherland is cant and bluff like their own twaddle about Belgium. Such

psychological limitations are plainly the penalty of egoism; the passionless study of Nature is the key that fits the wards of knowledge. There is no intoxicant like desire. It is the general paralytic that combines monstrous and irrational delusions born of a chronic inflammatory condition of the ego with progressive and incurable impotence.

I think then that we may consider it certain that this war is not going to terminate like a melodrama. And the only hope of peace, or even of truce, is, in my opinion, this, the gradual development of a balanced comprehension of the circumstances in the minds of the saner citizens of all countries concerned. Each man for himself must recover from the war-fever, return from the land of delirium, look facts fairly and squarely in the face, suppress indignation, anger, and the lust of revenge and booty, become mindful of certain essential characteristics of the situation, and, putting aside envy, malice, and hatred and all uncharitableness, try to acquire the very useful mental habit of sweet reasonableness.

We may pause a moment to catalogue the demands of the Jingoists, Chauvinists, Pangermans, Pan Slavists and Irredentists, as the five principal nations concerned respectively call their more dangerous lunatics. Their nationality is the only distinction between them; each has very much the same insane program, the essence of which is that he wants the moon.

To particularize in this case:

England wants (1) the German colonies; (2) the German navy; (3) Heligoland, and the dismantling of the coast fortresses; (4) an indemnity of a billion sterling; (5) security against any advance of German interests via Baghdad, or any arrangement which might forward these even indirectly.

France wants (1) Alsace-Lorraine; (2) probably, a great deal of extra territory; even, maybe, the Rhine as frontier; (3) an indemnity of a billion of francs; (4) secu-

rity against further attack, perhaps through annexing Belgium to France.

Russia wants (1) Constantinople, and the Balkans; (2) Galicia; (3) Danzig; (4) an indemnity of a billion of rubles; (5) the earth.

Germany and Austria want (1) Belgium; (2) Calais, and its hinterland; (3) the freedom of the seas; (4) Poland, as a barrier against the eternal menace of Russia; (5) an indemnity of a billion marks; (6) a genuine settlement of the Balkan question.

Italy wants (1) anything it can get; (2) less vaguely, the "lost provinces," (why not Britain, stolen shamefully from the Italians about 1,600 years ago?); (3) Savoy and Nice (if France is sufficiently weakened by the war to enable Italy to turn traitor again with impunity); (4) an indemnity of a billion tons of spaghetti.

It is certain that none of these nations can get everything on this program, and it is certain to most unprejudiced people at least that in every case it would be very bad for the nation itself to get its demands granted.

In order to gratify the legitimate and wholesome desires of all the parties to this dispute, it will be necessary for us to be neutral. Even if we are patriots, we must become neutral in order to be true patriots; for the sweet reasonableness which alone can lead to settlement of these conflicting claims is not compatible with national prejudice.

I know that this is an hard saying; that I am asking divine qualities to manifest in human minds; that even before the war there were very few people who used reason in preference to passion as a basis of action, and that now, when every man is wounded either in person, pocket or family, it appears unthinkable that even a few of them should lay aside their sense of injury. But, after all, the fever caused by wounds is temporary; in a little while the patients will no longer consider how to avenge their injuries, but how to recover from them; and any decent political doctor is sure to recommend complete

rest and quiet, with a diet not too stimulating or excessive. No doubt the saner minds will recover first; and they must be organized, so that their voice may be heard and obeyed.

The first task is to remove the silly lie of national hatred, the demonic and irrational illusion miscalled patriotism. If a "patriot" would think for a fraction of a second, he would see that while it would not do much damage to hate the population of Uranus, it may be a serious folly to hate the people in the house next door.

France needs the friendship of both England and Germany more than anything on earth; and should be ready to make the greatest sacrifices to get it. Had Germany made friends with France in 1871 by greater magnanimity, the present war would have never occurred, or have been with Russia only, and all over long ago.

Julius Caesar was as good a statesman as he was a soldier, and we all know how he treated conquered nations. His aim was always to leave them stronger for the conquest.

Porfirio Diaz rounded up the banditti by making them his rural police, with regular pay and plentiful privilege, more than they were getting as robbers. It would have taken him years to burn out their nests.

The English made India, or rather the Indian upper class, loyal by good administration; for one example, the late Maharaja of Moharbhaj found his income increased in ten years from three to eighteen lakhs of rupees. He might have skinned every native alive and failed to turn the three into four.

So rash gain means loss in the end; and generosity brings its own reward. Suppose that Germany keeps Antwerp, and wins also Calais, as the price of peace. It only means that friendship with England would be impossible, that England must arm against her desperately, that Holland must join with England, that France must continue her feud, that the people of the conquered ter-

ritory will make her occupation a series of revolts and repressions. If the coal were gold, and the harbors twenty instead of two, it would not be worth it, as a business proposition.

The same line of argument is to be applied to each demand; it will be found destructive. For example, what does England want with German colonies, now that half her adult males are killed or crippled? The naval question will settle itself, in a way which I proposed in a paper, "The Future of the Submarine," which was published some time ago in *The Fatherland*. As to indemnities, the subject demands yet another separate treatment; but the plain summary of it is this, that you cannot get blood from a stone, and the nations may one and all put any such nonsense out of their heads.

The only re-arrangements desirable or possible consist in small adjustments; and in order to discuss these we shall throw back our minds to Europe before the war, and identify the sore spots.

IV.

If the man in the moon suddenly dropped into New York, his first question would be to ask why the world was fighting, what any one of the belligerents hoped to gain. He would get no satisfactory answer. As the Crown Prince said, this war is, of all wars ever waged, the most aimless and stupid. The lust of Russia for Constantinople is the only positive ambition; England's fear of losing sea-power the only other factor, and that is negative. On the whole, Europe had got on pretty comfortable for a century. The Crimean was, the Italian flurries, and the war of '70 were the only disturbances of any size or importance, and it is just in these three neighborhoods that the soreness still remains. The peacemakers, inheriting the earth as per divine promise, were threatened with law suits by the rightful heirs. It is

desirable to deal with these matters in some detail, for there is an abstract principle of settlement which can be applied to all of them, and which, if radically adopted, may lead to lasting peace.

(a)

Alsace-Lorraine. The historical quarrels as to the true character of these districts are extremely absurd. We are not concerned with the question as to whether they were old-German until 1680; they belonged to the cave-man in 140,000 B.C. To settle the dispute is not difficult; the present frontier is not so bad, and a very slight rectification is all that is necessary. I urge Germany to be magnanimous in her own interest, and to give back to France those very French communes which are almost her cradle; but this is a small matter. The essential virtue of a frontier population is intensity of patriotism and contentment with the existing government; and this should be assured by transplanting any disgruntled elements with compensation full and generous. These communities should also be made prosperous at whatever cost to the central government; they have suffered more than any through the war, and stability is to be assured by prosperity.

But the root of the trouble is the presence of people who thought, however wrongly, that they were French, in a German province; their enmity has weakened Germany. They, and they alone, have kept alive the hostile feeling; for the true interests of France and Germany conflict nowhere. The result is that Germany has hundreds of miles of frontier to defend, instead of to repose on. She is encircled, instead of having a broad and fertile base. A Franco-German alliance is the natural possibility of the future, and the hope of every man who cares for civilization. An arrangement to share Belgium, including a land settlement scheme by which German sympathizers should be in the German section, French in

the French section, might help to heal existing wounds. That is the answer to the menace of bandit Russia and piratical England.

(b)

Trieste and the Trentino. It is difficult for one in whose reasonableness of Italy. The attitude of Russia is excused to one's larger humanitarianism by a consideration of her savagery and barbarism: Tartar sauce is Tartar sauce. Even the icy cynicism of Sir Edward Grey may have been founded on the fear that clutched his heart. But Italy was in no danger, and Italy was at one time the headquarters of civilization; yet we find her acting with the most cold-blooded calculation, awaiting the moment to strike her sworn allies, watching their blood run till she thought it was safe to risk robbing them. It is the most infamous piece of blackguardism in the world's history. There is nothing to parallel with it, even in the private life of the Borgias or some of the later Emperors of Rome. It almost expunges our memory of the art and letters of the middle ages, lighting up rather the fact that we have to thank Italy for the art of secret poisoning.

However, we command our indignation, and reflect only that there is truly a certain genuine discontent among the Italian population of the Austrian provinces of Trieste and the Trentino. It is here inadvisable to rectify the frontier, which is strategically admirable from the Austrian defensive standpoint. If the Italian armies advance to Trieste, they must infallibly be destroyed by a descent from the impregnable Trentino salient upon Verona, cutting them off from their base, while Pola threatens any attempt to support them by sea. The solution is therefore to remove the disaffected elements, compensating them so far as they hold property, and replacing them with a solid German-speaking peasantry from the Austrian Tyrol. This colonization should be fos-

tered with sedulous care; the system of peasant proprietorship should be fully developed, and the new inhabitants rooted firmly in the soil by prosperity and independence.

(c)

The Balkan problem. This is, of course, the crux. It was the Balkans that precipitated war, and settlement is difficult, owing to the chronic anarchy of the whole country. It has always appeared to me that the fall of Abdul Hamid was the withdrawal of the bolt of the hangman's trap on which blindfolded Europe stood with the noose of war about her neck. And I confess to seeing no solution but the restoration of the Turkish Empire, with the important reservation noted below, that it must be rendered homogenous. No better buffer could be devised. The division, not only of religion, but of civilization, is so acute that Turkey is not likely to meddle in European politics. It has a unity all its own, as could never be the case with a confederacy of cut-throats such as recently destroyed it only to fall out over the spoils, like the snarling dogs they are. So long as England supported Turkey, Russia, the only real menace to European peace, was throttled. So much was this so that she actually abandoned temporarily the idea of westward aggression, and occupied herself with the Far Eastern adventure. The threat remains, and will survive the war, will indeed survive any event but the civilization of Russia, which may begin (one perceives favorable omens) some two hundred years from now.

The transplantation scheme suggested above will still serve, but it must be applied on a colossal scale. The actual frontier of Turkey should be chosen with regard to strategic considerations, looking first of all to her defense against Russia. The "Christian" elements of the populations in the territory gained by Turkey should be drafted (with proper compensation) to other parts of

Europe, to fill the gaps made by the war. They would assimilate easily, and form a useful and vigorous new strain of blood. Any lack of inhabitants in the new and greater Turkey could be supplied readily from her congested Asiatic Possessions.

(d)

The only other problem of importance is that of Poland. This has been discussed at length in the essay, "The Blunder of Edward VII."

(e)

The question of England is not urgent. In a paper, "England on the Brink of Revolution," the probability is indicated. The day of the little peoples whom she has enslaved may be at hand. In particular, the Irish Republic must be no longer a poet's or a patriot's dream, but a fact. Much, too, will have to be done before her mad desertion of Mussulman Turkey is atoned for. Her hearty co-operation (if she exists sufficiently to cooperate) in the scheme of a greater Turkey outlined above would be her best chance. The Indian Mohammeden would perfectly understand, and believe, if he were told that England's war on Turkey was only a feint made with the real object of strengthening her. He would know that such duplicity was quite like England.

V.

It is to be hoped that no one will deem me megalomaniac to the point of supposing that I am the man, and that political wisdom will die with me. The scheme outlined above no doubt needs modification; but the principles involved are unassailable. They may be summarized briefly:

(1) The establishment of a new balance of power.

(2) The removal of all discontented political elements either by granting autonomy (as in Ireland) or transplanting them (as in Italia irredenta).

(3) The establishment of inalienable peasant proprietorship, especially near frontiers.

However, one might give up even these ideas. But of this one thing one can be as sure as one is of death, that no lasting settlement of any sort on any terms can be made unless the mental attitude disclosed in this article be adopted by all the better elements of the warring nations.

National hatred must be put aside utterly; even national aspiration must be forgotten. The peacemaker must come to his task as if he came from Canopus. He must be as wise as the serpent, and as resolutely deaf as the adder to the clamor of partisanship and false patriotism. He must be ready to give up the dearest principle for which his country has just shed its blood, if sweet reasonableness woo him. He must see Europe steadily and see it whole, if he is to make it whole again.

The mood of the Peace Congress must be that of Christ upon the Cross. No spark of malice or revenge must lurk in any breast; no self-seeker must pollute that sanctuary. The professional politician might be excluded with advantage; the philosopher and the poet might be lured from their retreats to make the peace. It is the mind and temper of a Plato that Europe needs today.
Adsum.