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THE END OF ENGLAND?

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(Aleister Crowley, the author of the following brilliant arraignment of England, is the foremost Irish poet living. He has been a frequent contributor to the principal English magazines and reviews, and his volumes of poetry have given him a definite place in English literature. This article is startling in its sharp analysis of contemporary England, and coming from the pen of one who really knows England, will compel many to readjust their opinion of "our mother country.")

O England! England, mighty England falls!
None shall lament her lamentable end!
The Voice of Justice thunders at her walls.
She would not hear. She shall not comprehend!
The nations keep their mocking carnivals:
She hath not left a friend!

The harlot that men called great Babylon,
In crimson raiment and in smooth attire,
The scarlet leprosy that shamed the sun,
The gilded goat that plied the world for hire:
Her days of wealth and majesty are done,
Men trample her for mire!

The temple of their God is broken down;
Yea, Mammon's shrine is cleansed! The house of her,
That cowed the world with her malignant frown,
And drove the Celt to exile and despair,
Is battered now—God's fire destroys the town;
London admits God's air.

They scorned the God that made them; yea, they said:
Lords of this globe, the Saxon race, are we;
Europe before us lies, as men lie dead;
Britannia—ho, Britannia rules the sea!
This night thy kingdom shall be finished,
Thy soul required of thee"

In these words (among others) I prophesized the end of England fifteen years ago. I was only a boy, with a boy's vision; and the poems have the oracular vitality.

It is now possible to fill in the details in prose.

At that time, had I been asked for visible signs of decay, I could only have said that Queen Victoria would have spelt the end of anything, and that a nation of the size of England which could be so strained in assassinating the wives and children of a handful of farmers had not soundness. Subsequently it proved that the conquest of the Boers was indeed the final effort of a giant with a groggy heart. No sooner was the Transvaal won than it had to be restored. Today the Uitlander is just as ill (or as well) treated as under Kruger, and the British public acquiesces in the wholesale shooting of British miners by Botha, for the crime of striking.

Yes, it is the heart of England that is rotten, and I am eager to enhance my reputation as a prophet by elaborating the sketches that I made in boyhood. I propose to show the symptoms of British decadence, and to detail what must inevitably occur.

To begin at the bottom, with George V.

Where is the Kaiser? In the trenches.

King Albert? Hiding somewhere in England, hag-ridden by Queen Mary and the other nightmare, Zeppelins.

I do not blame M. Poincaré for not being at the front; it is no part of the theory that he should be there. The Czar, too, may be excused. He is half mythical, like the Mikado; a sacred demi-deity in the eyes of his ignorant subjects, not a man like themselves. But England was once famous for her warrior kings. William the Conqueror (not to mention Arthur Pendragon), Henry I, Edward III (and the Black Prince, his son), Henry V, and so on. Even Richard Crookback, by virtue of his indomitable spirit, looks prettier to posterity than Edward IV, glutton, drunkard, and profligate. Henry VII won his throne by force; even Charles I took the field, weakling as he was in many ways. Charles II fought for his rights, and so did the legitimate heirs of his throne, James III and Prince Charles Edward Stuart. Their ghosts must be glad today to think that George V is none of theirs, but the issue of a paper king, a parliamentary phantom, the imported King Log George I, made in Germany.

The only decent class in England today is the landed gentry. It is blood that counts. They go willingly into battle. They are nourished well from infancy, protected against contamination until they are strong enough to resist it, trained in field sports, breathe in freedom and the habit of command with every breath; they have the traditions of courage and loyalty, and

they make good. In particular, that moral principle of friendship which made Sparta and Athens famous is inculcated in every public school, and in the church; while, in the universities, it is the very badge of Oxford, and the secret fountain of the glory of Cambridge.

This class is accordingly physically and morally well-developed. It is a caste of castes, and it is a fighting caste, though only a small percentage become professional soldiers. But it supplies India, where 10,000 English hold down 300,000,000 natives by sheer moral superiority, and the civil services, which rule the Cabinet itself by tact and social prestige. Its members recognize each other at sight, and hang together to the death. Of course, there are bad eggs, but even in heaven Satan drew a third of the angels after him.

Outside this class we find the royal family, the bourgeois, and the working man. Also the present government. And here there is nothing but corruption. The breakdown of the feudal system was the social ruin of England. Shakespeare began life as a patriot; but thirty years of London turned him into a savage satirist, and in the end he never missed an opportunity to lash the English.

We may look in vain for first-class poets to praise England in its degeneration. Shelley, Keats, Blake, Byron, Burns, all lash England with their scorn. It turned Shelley into an Atheist and an anarchist; it killed Keats; it made Blake a solitary, and Byron an exile. Swinburne boils over again and again in "Songs Before Sunrise" and elsewhere, before the prophet-soul went out of him, and left him a mere literary man. He sees England one with the tyrants and slaves, her dream of liberty dead. See "Perinde a Cadaver," "An Appeal," "To Walt Whitman in America," and many another. Even shallower souls, such as the well-fed intellectual Browning, only praises England ("Home thoughts from Abroad," and "An Englishman in Italy") from the safe distance of Gibraltar or Asolo. Kipling only praises the landed classes and their serfs and vassals, either in India or at home. Tennyson was a mere toady, a stringer-together of rimes, a valet 'connait au fond service d'intérieur," little better than Alfred Noyes: no poet or prophet any more than a grocer.

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We have then clearly in our minds how England has been degenerating since 1600, and how her poets have warned her. Like Jerusalem, she is already morally destroyed. All events take place in the soul; material happenings are but the crystallization of those forces. Let us now turn to the present, and watch the death-agony of the empire.

II.

I traveled through France, from Pontarlier to Dieppe, during the mobilization, and confess to infinite pride and pleasure in the temper of the people. The hour had struck; it was time to go to business. That was all. There was no hysteria, no crowds crying "A Berlin," hardly even enthusiasm. But no hesitation or regret. Determination is the word, in its full philosophical sense; '70 had taught the French a lesson. They did not want to fight, but they were prepared to fight; and, now was declared, they were fighting. Every person automatically switched over from the business of peace to the business of war. Politics disappeared; Socialism disappeared. It seemed as though the people recognized intuitively that these things were but the amusements of leisure.

(The same mental attitude was, of course, equally firm in Germany. Even Belgium, betrayed by its rulers for British gold, earned the past subsidies manfully. The people went to their double-cross crucifixion like sheep to the slaughter; and as a sheep before the shearers is dumb, so opened they not their mouths.)

After a week in Paris, a week of comradeship, I crossed to England, and had the shock that only great disgust can bring. Imagine a son three years away from home, who should return to find his mother walking the streets! I had foolishly believed that the magnitude of the catastrophe would have stripped off shams, shocked everyone into common sense, awakened manhood, and the rest of it. I am a poet, and cannot understand stupidity. But the English had not realized the war at all! On the contrary, the whole of the British press had gone madder than ever. Only Bernard Shaw, Cunninghame Graham, and Frank Harris, of all the world of writers, even tried to keep their heads. There was nothing but silly screams and coarse jeers. The Crown Prince was a common thief; every German was a murderer and a coward; he only attacked women and children; he did nothing but get drunk and commit rape, robbery, assassination, mutilation, and cannibalism. The iron discipline of the German army disappeared (on paper) with a stroke of a pen. Men whose very lives depended on self-control, obedience to orders, avoidance of every kind of excess, were pictured as a gang of lawless bandits frenzied with drink. This horde of raving savages was, however, destroying the strongest fortresses in the world as an avalanche destroys a chalet; these drunken baby-killers chased the British army as greyhounds chase a hare. Observe the time taken in the "masterly retreat" from Mons, and what becomes of the story of stubborn rearguard ac-

tions? "A little British army goes a damned long way" indeed, when the Uhlans are behind it.

They have recovered now, because the gentry have enlisted as privates. When the gentry are all killed off, good night!

To return to the moral attitude of England. The majority were frankly bored. An infernal nuisance, war, in the height of the holiday season! Others were scared, laid in many months' supplies of food, dug holes beneath their cellars, and awaited Zeppelins as a bird awaits a snake.

There was no sane body of public opinion vocal, no one to see that, was being war, the way to win was to get a bigger and better army than your enemy. Only Kitchener saved the situation, and he had to insist on a practical dictatorship. They did all they could to tie him up. In the whole country only he, Lord Roberts and Sir Edward Grey were trusted. Lord Roberts was too old to act; Sir Edward Grey was only known in his own class! Winston Churchill was thought clever, but a mountebank and a scoundrel. Asquith was thought honest, but a drunkard. Lloyd George was known to be a thief, one of the infamous gang of the Marconi swindles.

The King was a mere nobody. The sturdy backwoodsmen of Australia had roared with laughter when he came with his mincing steps, his pigmy stature, his fishy bulging eyes, to their shores. Such was the feeling in India against the weak watery nincompoop that his tour had to be cut short. In England he was known not to have a will of his own. When Mary said it was bed-time, to bed he went. The Prince of Wales? Only a boy, an amiable imbecile with hanging head and dropped jaw. No hope in royalty. Kitchener, and Kitchener alone, saved the republic. Grey had brought about the war; but, having done so, he was of no more use. But Kitchener was in the public eye; Kitchener was trusted, and Kitchener was worthy of the trust. He, too, held dearly to that tradition of manly friendship which is the backbone of a nation; and his caste rallied to him as one man.

But the public never stirred. When he wanted his recruiting posters on every taxicab, the men refused. They might lose a shilling here or there. Only when the gentlemen of England refused to ride in any cab that did not have the poster did they change their note.

Then, the kind of woman that no one ever offered to kiss in her life began to offer kisses to recruits. ("Death in the trenches for me!" said one soldier). They also offered white feathers to civilians. This practice received a slight check when it became known that one of their victims was a dispatch rider from General French! It will amaze history that all this hysterical

campaign should have been possible. It was ridiculous; it was useless, and in a country with a sound heart there would have been neither need nor time for it.

Sane publicists—of whom there were a few, persons who in peace time had been of no importance owing to their inability to degrade themselves by servility and venality—knew from the first that these methods of hysteria were of no avail. They advocated conscription, or financial pressure on the recalcitrant. They knew that no spark of patriotism yet lurked in the hearts of this degenerate race, this sexless, irreligious, crew of creatures lost to self-respect and self-control, beings rotted out of humanity by industrialism and cheap newspapers.

So England had a music hall military spirit, and a newspaper courage. Every one was glad when anyone else went to fight. The recruit was clapped on the back, and treated to a beer, and called a hero, and thought a bloody fool.

The "spy peril" was another sign of decadence. France and Germany promptly popped every enemy into prison within twenty-four hours, and no words wasted. In England to achieve this result needed a newspaper campaign, and in the course of it the *Globe* was nearly suppressed for saying plain sensible things. Then they had a registration system which annoyed the innocent, and had no effect on the guilty. Then they published a statement that they had a countermining system for spies which made them rather a help than otherwise. Ultimately, they woke with a start and thrust every alien into a dungeon without enquiry; that is, after all the real spies had finished their work and got away. Of course, the truth was that there were so many spies in the royal household, the Privy Council, the Admiralty, and the War Office that it was very difficult to act! Instead of smooth, swift action, there was vacillation, and at last unnecessary violence. In this, as in all other matters, there was so much talk and so little action that it seemed as if one of George Bernard Shaw's plays had come to life!

Similarly, there was a disposition to wreak vengeance on the enemy in ways hardly suited to an intelligent nursery. "Prussian Blue" was renamed "Royal Blue. The "King of Prussia" inn was deprived of its P. I myself suggested Edingrad, Middlesgrad, etc., and nobody laughed. They barred German music; they refused to buy German pianos. I hear that today animal lovers are writing to the papers to protest against the ill-treatment of Dachshunds. I only wonder they did not shoot children for having German measles. "One of the Williams" wrote to, and was printed in, the "Daily Mail" to the effect that the name of William was now for ever accursed, and he and all other honest Williams would change their name for the heroic

name of Albert. I agree. I propose, too, to make it retrospective. Thus: Albert the Conqueror, Albert Wordsworth, Albert Blake, Albert Shakespeare, and so on. Also (please please!) per contra, the William Memorial. Such are symptoms not of mere fever, but of consumption or of cancer in the body politic.

The next item is the censorship. This was conducted on lines which show how the general corruption of the people had infected the official mind. True policy would have made the most of reverses, in the hope of stirring some latent manhood in the people. But perhaps the censors know there was none. No surgery can supply a spine.

However, they suppressed all that wise men in a decent country could have published, and published nearly all that should have been suppressed.

The stupid story of the million Russians was industriously circulated by the Secret Service, apparently in the hope of fooling the Germans! Instead, people merely failed to see why they should enlist; the Russians could do it all.

They concealed the "Audacious" disaster. They ought to have made it six dreadnoughts rather than one, and asked for more men and money.

Even when men did enlist they treated them so badly that they ran away, even before they saw the Germans!

However, ultimately they got some men; nobody knows how many. There is a silly bluff about 3,000,000. These must be the "rogues in buckram suits" and the "knaves in Kendal green" of "Falstaff."* Indeed, the whole story of the recruiting makes one think of Shakespeare's great scene with Mouldy, Bullcalf, Shadow, Wart, and Feeble.

If there be 3,000,000, however, it will be only another feather, if a draggled one, in the Kaiser's cap. For there are not 3,000,000 men in England, only slaves. And, having got them, what happens? What do their fathers, brothers, sons, and cousins do? Do they accept the hardships implicit in war? Do they work cheerfully to supply the army? Not a bit of it. They just strike for more pay. Even as the Glasgow merchants, with connections high in the political world, sell munition of war to the Germans, they think only of their purses and their paunches.

And how does the government reply? Not in the manly way by commandeering every man and every munition in the country, but by laying the blame on drink. Prohibition is to be the cure for selfishness, cowardice, callousness as to their country's

* A month after they have got the 3,000,000 they are starting a new recruiting campaign.

fate. A fine race to make an army of! Where are the descendants of the sturdy English billmen that won Crecy, the bowmen with their yard long shafts that turned Agincourt into a shambles?

Does the government recognize the fact that Englishmen are no more men? If so, it dare not say so. It whines "this is a German plot," "German agents are fomenting discontent." A noble confession! What of the countermine spy system that was so successful! What of the arrest of all the German bands? One had really hoped that having cut the throat of the last barber, and strangled the last waiter in his napkin, and broken the last trombone over its owner's head, one would have had a little ease from fear. But now it appears that all the Smiths are really Schmidts, and the Williams Wilhelms. (It is really a little awkward, all the royal family being German!)

And so the war drags on; England's good blood freely shed, whether in a right cause or a wrong; the independent workman carousing and loafing. He doesn't think the Zeppelins will come to Liverpool and Glasgow, Cardiff and Manchester. And if England is conquered, why, his work is always worth so much a day, and German beer is as good as English beer, and what he's really looking for is "The Coming Triumph of Marxian Socialism."

III.

It is easy to see that the bourgeois is the bottomless pit. This is the one incurable plague.

The bourgeois is infected to the marrow; there is no sound spot in him. The royal family would matter no more than a wart were it not nourished by the snobbish adulation of the middle classes. The workingman has been brought to his present purulence by the knavery of the bourgeois. For there are only two qualities in him: he cheats, and he shams. Cowardice, parsimony, hypocrisy, and the rest of his vices are only accidentals.

"His God is his belly; his glory is in his shame; he minds earthly things."

He superseded the squire when the late Prince Consort made trade genteel; and his triumph spelt the end of manhood and of patriotism. For your commercial man has no stake in the country; he has no fatherland; he is merely a parasite on whatever country is fool enough to nourish him. His real capital is his experience in cheating other people; and he can do that anywhere. Thinking only of money, he is utterly unscrupulous. The slave-owners might ill-treat their slaves now and again; the feudal barons might be harsh and tyrannical to their serfs. But this was

ignorance; if they had been enlightened they would have seen that it was to their interest to protect them. But the Manchester school was very enlightened indeed; it deliberately calculated that the cheapest way was to work a man to death and hire another.

The result of the efforts of this school has been to destroy the English peasantry, to empty the country of men, and fill the towns with phantoms. The average stature of the lower classes in England has decreased by inches in 100 years; that of the upper classes has increased. It is as if two races were differentiating. And the bourgeois has gone on his way rejoicing. He has wormed his way into the rind of society, always servile, always envious, always ashamed of himself, always cringing to a lord, and haughty to a workman, obsequious to a "lady." and rude to a "person."

His trade has cured him of any impulse to honor or to honesty; loyalty and friendship are incompatible with snobbery, and your bourgeois will cut a life-long friend when he gets made a city knight. He spends half his time yelling for more soldiers and sailors to protect his beastly commerce, the other half yelling for less soldiers and sailors so as to save his pocket. Between the two nothing gets done, and England enters the greatest war in history with a reach-me-down army at two and eleven three, thank you, madam.

Even Lord Roberts and other "alarmists" were made the tools of thieves. Newspapers started periodical scares, at which the editors scoffed in private, for the bribes of the armament companies.

It is impossible to imagine a state of society more corrupt.

In order, however, to sustain the peculiar conditions which favored the chicanery of the shopkeeper, it was important never to allow any seed of truth to germinate. Once let light in by however small a chink in however remote a corner, and who can tell what may be disclosed?

There was no love of country anywhere; but newspaper patriotism makes a fine noise, and it is easy to shout down any inquirer. So the Boer war went through, and the last scrap of the honor of England went with it. It was "unpatriotic" to inquire into the misdeeds of contractors, or the briberies of politicians. Whitewash became the only wear.

It is impossible for anyone but another Gibbon to write, as it should be written, the "Decline and Fall of the British Empire." I could write reams of its rottenness, but I should still find new instances. There are, it seems, perhaps, but a few spots on the skin—mere copper-colored rashes. But of what are they the

sign? Of a pox so virulent and so exhausting that in but a little the English must lose their national existence.

The spectacle of the tradesman fighting against conscription, which would send them to the front, while using every wile, trick and coercion to send others to the front, is so shameful, though I can thank God I am a Celt by blood, I feel angry that I did not leave England forever the moment I had done with Cambridge.

However, if only every Celt will refuse to fight for anything but the freedom of his own country, the English will soon destroy themselves altogether, and we shall inherit their language, the only worthy thing they have, and which their newspapers have not yet succeeded in debauching and degrading beyond repair.

("The International.")