

The New Parsifal A Study of Wilhelm II

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World-crises are always preceded by world-prophets. The artist is the secret incarnation of the *Zeitgeist*; his contemporaries always fail to recognize him even as an artist, unless he lives long enough to impose his will upon them, and so see the world swing slowly towards his sun.

I am fortunate in that, young as I still am, I behold the establishment of the moral principles for which I fought even as a boy. I see the death agony of sham religion, the destruction of that cave of petty tyrannies and narrow ideals that the "good" called the "home," the general recognition of what was then called degeneracy, but was in truth moral courage asserting its divine destiny, as part of the normal life of the best men. Hypocrisy is squirming still, but such is the habit of slain reptiles. So, before I am forty, I find the world almost an ideal place to live in. Being an optimist, I had hoped much; but this greatest thing I had hardly dared to hope, the dissolution of Syphilization in universal war. Only in my prophet-mood could I speak it aloud.

I feel that there is a certain historical importance in making this claim, for the Celtic race, the holy clan that derive even their blood from Osiris and Isis, must constantly deserve the golden harp upon the banner of green, the symbol of poetic inspiration, and the older banner, the sun blaze, which I bear on my own shield, token of the fatherhood of Apollo.

For there were prophets in the shrine before me, and it is of them I speak. The weapon of one was music, of the other philosophy. And these two men understood what was seething in Europe, were torn by the

throes of the birth of this giant child of Time, Horus, the God of War. And so secret and so awful was this labor that no poet could join their godly company, else it may be the birth had been hastened and the child still-born. Even now when he is come, he appears in so black a veil that men, remembering the prophet of Khorassan, shudder and pass on.

But after the rule of the prophet comes the rule of the king. In the world-crisis which they foresee arises the hero. And just as they are forced to prophesy against their will, so often enough the hero is a man of peace. Any one who has studied the history of Napoleon with broad clear vision will not read ambition, but necessity, in his campaigns. The shallow mind forgets that at that time France, already self-mutilated and bleeding from the revolution, was beset by the armies of the world. Napoleon saved France from Bourbon sloth, stupidity and selfishness in the hour of the ruin they had brought about. His subsequent wars were the fruits of his past victories. If you disturb equilibrium ever so little the whole universe shakes. In order to readjust the machinery which has slipped a single cog, it may sometimes be necessary to scrap the whole plant and rebuild it from new material. It is impossible to localize war. For the moment the affair may be prevented from spreading, but the force continues to operate invisibly.

So by the irony of the gods the warrior king is often a man of peace. The popular mind is unable to perceive these subtleties. It tends to regard Julius Caesar as a warrior rather than as a legislator, and Mohammad to this day is considered rather as the conqueror than as the greatest author and lawgiver of the Christian era, the man who built up a civilization whose essential force carried Europe through the dark ages, and prevented the destruction of knowledge from being complete.

Thus, it being necessary for the popular mind to interpret the prophets in some concrete manner, the popular imagination seizes on some convenient figure

and makes him a hero. These he stands, in marble sometimes, more often in bronze, but always colossal, with the inscription "Hail Saviour of the World" upon the pedestal.

In the present crisis there are more pigmies than men. Obscene dwarfs like George V, pot-bellied *bourgeois* like Poincaré, could only become heroic by virtue of some Rabelais magic-wand. Joffre and Kitchener are quiet business-like subordinates with no qualities that can seize the reins of the horses of Apollo. The Czar is a nobody.

But there is no necessity to seek so far. The lavish gods have matched their prophets well with their hero this time. Wilhelm II¹ has always been to a certain extent conscious of himself as an incarnation of Lohengrin, Siegfried, Parsifal.

The last thing that Wagner wanted to draw was an overman. Wagner's intellect was socialistic. But the prophet in him, as in every true artist, was aristocratic; and every time he drew, he drew a saviour. His hero was not merely a king, but a holy king. He was the custodian of a sacred treasure; he wielded magic weapons, and wore armor consecrated and invulnerable.

It was a great thing for Germany that she had an emperor with the intelligence to perceive what these things meant, and to realize himself as the Messiah of whom the prophet Wagner spoke. This being so, he stepped readily and naturally into the place, as on a well-rehearsed stage. Already, before the war is ended, he is apparent even to neutrals and to enemies as the central figure of the drama, the new Agamemnon.

This is the age of fairy tales. The newspapers have weaned us from the truth. So even the All-lies have conspired in stupid hate to endow the Kaiser with all the qualities of a demigod. In truth, to his own soldiers he appears, flashing hither and thither, like St Michael, to rally, to encourage, to lead forward in the charge. Where the fight is thickest, there is the emperor, pale

and stern, like Christ as he arose from Gethsemane and walked forth to meet Fate, and to find triumph and immortal glory. From front to front he rages, whirling aloft the consecrated sword of his fathers. He never spares himself; he is a comrade to every soldier in the ranks.

There is something here to catch the popular imagination. To his very enemies he seems like Lucifer or Atilla. Not wholly human. They endow him with the magic gifts; he is reported simultaneously on every battle-front, as well as in a dozen of his castles. Even the Crown Prince is killed a hundred times and rises to renew the combat, ever more glorious because more glittering as he breaks through the spider-web of myth whose gossamer shrouds him as with the veil of a high priestess over the silver armor of a knight of the Graal.

There is no such magic drapery about the Czar. He is in Petrograd, and goes to the front now and again, a mere king, hardly a warrior king, certainly not a sacred king, and still less a demi-god. But Wilhelm II is the genius of his people. He has the quality that Castor and Pollux had for Rome. He seems omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, the very angel of God, terrible and beautiful, sent to save the Fatherland from savage foes. Even if he perish, he will not perish as a man. He will acquire the radiance of Milton's Satan, and go down the ages as the hero of the great lost cause of humanity.

None will know the place of burial. Legends will grow up around him as they did for Christ, for Balder, for Adonis, for Arthur, for Mohammed, for Napoleon. "He is not really dead; he will come again to lead his people to the final triumph," will be the word in the mouth of every peasant, and a subconscious hope in the heart of every noble. The poet will know that this is mystically true; for he knows that there is no death, that character is more permanent than flesh and blood, that men are in truth the incarnation of some god. He knows that the hero, compact of myth, is yet more real than the historical figure of the man himself. Imagination

holds more truth than science; art is real, life is illusion. For art holds the idea complete and pure, the divine thought clothed about with beauty. Art formulates deity; art, from the quarries of the amorphous earth, builds its imperishable palace of white marble, or of onyx, porphyry and malachite.

Ave, Guglielme! Rex, imperator! Hail, Saviour of the world, that, clad in golden armor, with the helm of holiness, wieldest the sword! Hail, sovereign and saviour, that healest all the disease of the ages, that hurlest back the heathen from the sacred realm.

Welcome to the world that lay in anguish, hungering for thy dawn, O sun of righteousness! The holy kings of old salute thee; the prophets anoint thee with the oil of benediction; they offer thee the crown of Europe. The poets see thee, and know thee; their songs weave silken veils about thine armor!

Ave, Guglielme, rex, imperator!

NOTES:

1. It is remarkable that Franz Josef fits in quite well as the aged king. He is Titurel.