

EUROPE'S FUTURE¹

SHORTLY before the fall of France, there appeared in *La Vie Intellectuelle* a striking article by a French historian, G. de Reynold. The writer was then living in the centre of Europe and was thus very favourably placed to study current events. Many of his reflections are as relevant to-day as they were in 1940, and might prove of interest to a larger public. It is with this object in view that I would like to refer to them here.

De Reynold begins his article by putting forward the opinion that Europe, geographically speaking, can scarcely be considered a continent; her space is too restricted, her peoples too mixed and individual to produce a homogeneous civilisation. She is more in the nature of an Asiatic peninsula. Had it not been for Christianity she would by this time have been absorbed by Asia; yet we find her still the ombril of the world, fitted by Providence for a high and unique destiny. With Europe's natural order and arrangement—easy access to the sea and splendid internal lines of communication—it is only when Christianity weakens within her borders that a general disintegration occurs—and M. de Reynold is of opinion that should there ever be *total* apostasy it would be a sure presage of death, a death heralded by a long agony. The weakening in Christian beliefs has always been the forerunner of some Asiatic assault, or at any rate of the imminent danger of such a thrust. This danger is enhanced by the fact that the Asiatic conception of Empire, ever since the days of Diocletian, has exercised a distorting and sinister influence on the European conception of the *Imperium Romanum*. Asia is a continent of 'worlds,' its pattern is the Empire, whereas Europe is composed of nations and its pattern is the 'kingdom.'

But even in Asia, we have to distinguish between the more stable Asia of the Desert and that of the Steppe. The former has given birth to complete and monumental civilisations, but the nomads of the Steppe, hemmed in as they have been between the Roman and the Christian *limes* and the Wall of China, inhabit an unstable Asia, ready to invade, to conquer and to destroy. M. de Reynold therefore declares the necessity, in the East and the West alike, of a Power which can boast of an ancient civilisation and act as a barrier against aggression.

¹ The substance of an article by G. de Reynold in '*La Vie Intellectuelle*,' January, 1940.

Now European civilisation used to recognise a European Order based on the Roman Empire; and, although the clerks of the Middle Ages may have given it an almost divine significance, so that its eventual disappearance was unthinkable, we cannot for that dismiss belief in its worth. . . . The *Imperium Romanum* did indeed perish, but not solely under the weight of barbaric pressure. State Absolutism, venality, a low birthrate, military weakness and too extensive a frontier (in a word its own faults) contributed to its fall.

The only effective means of preventing Christendom from succumbing to Asiatic attack was through some reconstitution of 'Empire.' The disintegration of the Western Empire opened the way to the Barbarian and resulted in three centuries of anarchy, and that of the Carolingian Empire had even more disastrous effects. Never had Europe been nearer ruin. We may incidentally ask whether the disasters of those times would have been so serious had it not been for the presence in Europe of traitors and accomplices, many of whom were to be found in the ranks of the Faithful themselves.

Then, as now, an often unconscious spirit of revenge was abroad, and the excuse of the 'overpowering claims of national interest' was not unknown, although it was expressed in different terms.

If to-day we are not to be misled nor fall into irreparable errors, we shall have to think in 'epochs' and not in 'moments,' and shall also have to remember that contemporary events are but *links* in a long chain.

The present situation differs from similar occurrences in the past principally in its magnitude. From the 18th century onwards applied science has placed in the hands of the masses weapons unknown in even the recent past; a newly-awakened barbarism armed to the teeth has arisen, and material progress which should have served mankind and been harnessed to constructive ends has been prostituted and utilised for total destruction.

The danger is heightened by the fact that man, left to himself, tends to return to his troglodyte habits and that beneath the most cultured appearance lurks the 'beast.' It is a question of depth.

We may have thought that our hyperintellectual and scientific civilisation would succeed in taming our affective powers; on the contrary it seems to have unleashed them.

This it is that makes the contemporary scene so much more precarious than it was after the irruption of the Hun or the death of Charlemagne, European civilisation was then weak and threatened mainly because of its youth; to-day that excuse can scarcely be made.

De Reynold lays the chief blame for the present state of affairs on those responsible for the enunciation and spread of anti-Christian propaganda in modern times, resulting as it assuredly has in a corresponding moral decline. Two outstanding signs of such decline are an infatuation with the primitive, the instinctive and the sub-conscious, and a progressive return to barbarism through the flattery of *imitation*. The whole of what we like to call Modern Times is in fact nothing less than a spaced-out Revolution. Before culminating in action, it has long been prepared, developed and matured in men's minds. It started with a false conception of man's nature and destiny, a complete reversal of the divinely constituted order. But it revealed itself only gradually according to the dominant pre-occupation of the moment.

Thus, when the chief interest centred round ecclesiastical reform, a great religious revolution was brought about; the so-called enfranchisement of the human mind and the advent of secular humanism signified an intellectual revolution. Having reached the arena of political life, ideas were translated into such concrete happenings as those of 1789.

The economic and social orders were next to feel the impact of the revolution. After that, the uprising of the elemental and the instinctive, the descent into a sub-human domain have marked our final regression.

Now every revolution contains in itself not only the germs of the one that succeeds it, but of all those which are to follow. The first explosion only heralds others of a more violent and radical nature. History has shown that there is no deviation from this plan; time, place and circumstances alone differ. So, if we are to witness a counter-revolution, it must be an attack from below. The whole edifice has so to speak to be re-scaled, the original tower recaptured, and above all, we must lay hold of the CROSS that surmounts it—and turn away from that pantheism of nature, race and blood which is purely a mass-phenomenon. The word Mass-civilisation is a contradiction in terms, for civilisation has to do with organisation, hierarchy and order; only Barbarism deals with the collective. Once the mass-idea is set in motion, natural determinism is master of the field and a return to servitude is the inevitable result.

Liberty belongs only to the 'Person.' But it is important to make it quite clear that Liberty is too mighty a weapon for selfish *individualism* to wield; it can only stagger under the weight of true freedom. The individual element in man (which is not synonymous with the term the 'human person') in claiming the right to all

liberties, may well be on the way to losing true *liberty*. . . . Where Christianity no longer reigns, the 'liberty of the children of God' gradually expires.

These remarks may appear to many to reflect the deepest pessimism. But to trace these tendencies to their logical conclusion, so as to forestall and prevent their realisation, is really paving the way for 'optimistic action.' Our overweening confidence in nature, reason and progress, our idolatrous humanism and dreams of an earthly paradise have not led us far. That does not mean however that we need despair or yield to an apocalyptic mysticism. We have come to the end of 'a' world, and this, simply because the force of revolution is spent. Facing the opposite slope we have no choice except slowly and painfully to make the ascent. We are called to undertake a different course of action and in a different spirit.

We can and we ought to defend European civilisation and our native land; we can and we ought to defend the essential liberties of human personality, reason, moderation and justice; we can and we ought to return to what is fundamental, unchangeable and permanent.

But we can no longer and we ought no longer to defend the shaky fabric of the 19th century; that century is beyond recall. It was our 'ancient régime,' let it mark the end of an epoch.

Another era of civilisation is in its birth-throes. As yet it is nameless, it will be for us to baptise it. We are still living in crepuscular darkness; uncertainty, unrest, confusion, anarchy and violence necessarily accompany such times of transition. But if at the *close* of every epoch we have noted a decline in Christian belief, it is no less true to say that a revival of Christian faith heralds the *birth* of every new epoch. Europe cannot escape from Christianity; it looks as if this were indeed her 'line of force.' It is by taking our stand upon that line that we will be led out of a just war into a just peace, along the path of order into the broader highway of charity.

Such a resolution however must be a conscious act. It will need great intellectual effort to maintain a sense of proportion and a balanced judgment regarding the situation as a whole.

And no less an effort will have to be made if the individual and the collective responsibilities of all the nations involved in to-day's unexampled tragedy are to receive adequate recognition.

Such were the conclusions reached regarding the European situation four years ago by a French historian.

It is for readers of these opinions to pronounce in favour of or against them in the light of subsequent events.

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