

ENGLAND'S POLITICAL FUTURE

WHEN General Smuts delivered his much-discussed *Thoughts on the New World* he gave utterance to some home-truths which badly needed enunciating. As he warned his audience, his remarks were intended to be stimulating, lacking in 'diplomatic' qualification, not to be an expression of carefully-balanced policy. Especially have his remarks about France provoked reaction. 'A nation,' he said, 'that has been overtaken by a catastrophe such as she has suffered, reaching to the foundations of her nationhood, will not easily resume her nationhood again. We may talk about her as a Great Power, but talking will not help her much.'

There have been protests against these blunt, almost brutal, words, by those who love and long for the culture of France. But these protests are not to the point; the culture of a nation survives and is of influence long after that nation has ceased to be a political reality, and French culture will be no exception. But to be a political reality a nation must have a State-will which can be made effective both for national life and for external preservation, and such a State-will demands at least a measure of national unity. The prospects of French unity—and this General Smuts must have had in mind—fill her friends with dismay, if not despair. News from Algiers does not suggest the development of a wide national coalition of French statesmen and the prospect is more easily foreseen in the words of a charming French actress, depicted in *Picture Post* of Nov. 27th, 1943, as saying: 'After the war there will be a lot of people to be shot in France. Then we will start again.'

The problem of national unity is posed for England also, who in the after-war years will be faced, says General Smuts, by the problem of her allies, Russia, 'the new Colossus in Europe,' and the United States, 'with enormous assets, with wealth and resources and potentialities of power beyond measure.' On the other hand, he says, England will have 'nothing left in the till.' She will be rich in spiritual prestige, but 'poor in substance.' If, then, England and the Empire is to remain a political reality, and not a mere cultural influence, the need of national unity becomes inescapable. Is such a unity possible? The opposition between what we may call 'Moderate Planners' and 'All-out Planners' threatens at times to become very acute, these being the two sides in the debate as to how far the State is to control the expressions of the nation's life. In this

débate there is a curious reversal of the party-rôles of a hundred years ago, seeing that, roughly speaking, the Conservatives to-day are on the more *laissez-faire* side, while the Radicals are the 'All-out Planners.' There is little doubt as to which side General Smuts is on. 'I think,' he says, 'the times in which we live do not really permit of very rigid, fixed opinions, or of any dogmatic outlook on life or on the problems before us.' And it is fairly certain that Mr. Churchill shares this opinion. But, to speak frankly, the question now arises as to how long Mr. Churchill will be enabled to maintain the union between Conservatives and Radicals upon which the present effective State-will of England depends. Should he disappear, is there any alternative source of national unity?

It is, perhaps, time that the position of the Crown in English affairs was once again passed in review. England was in mortal danger of extinction as a political reality in 1940, a situation which dated back to the failure in the years 1935-1938 to take adequate measures against German and Japanese armaments and aggressions. It was unfortunate that during those years King George V was nearing the end of his long and wearying reign. King Edward VIII was largely absorbed by those events which led to his abdication, and King George VI too recently and too unexpectedly placed upon the throne to be in a position to grasp the mortal danger threatening his country and his empire. Were those monarchs ever made aware of the facts of comparative armaments which would have demonstrated that danger? What precisely is the procedure to-day in supplying the Monarch with confidential information? If the Crown has not the information, and is therefore not in a position to intervene when, as in these last years, the whole future of the polity it rules is mortally threatened, then a vital element in the Constitution has been set aside and the Monarchy must be adjudged no longer a political, but only a cultural, element in English life. This very important matter should be clarified. We may, perhaps, remind ourselves of Queen Victoria asserting that Mr. Gladstone 'will find the Queen very determined and firm on all that concerns the honour, dignity and safety of the Vast Empire confided to her care and which she wishes to hand down unimpaired to her children and their children's children.'

This brief review of the situation should at least emphasise the necessity for serious study of the foundations of English life to-day. Apart from General Smuts' invaluable *obiter dicta*, some recent books will be found useful to the ordinary citizen. *Britain's Third Chance*, by Stephen King-Hall, is a loosely put-together commentary on the mistakes made in this country since the last war and the

rôle in the future which England may hope to play if she sets her affairs in order. Commander King-Hall is useful and stimulating on this question of internal reconstruction, and has some wise things to say about relations with our mighty allies, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. Where he seems to fail is in his outlining of the problem of our enemies, especially with regard to Germany, an agonising problem which he shelves by relapsing into a discussion of national symbolism. But, apart from the problem which she sets to civilisation as a whole, the problem which Germany sets this country is the same as that set by Russia, that of a far larger political unit with a more powerful State—will actuated by a more highly-organised national unity. 'We must be prepared to find that even after defeat the Second World War will appear to the German war-party to have been on balance a favourable operation. What will be remembered will be not so much the actual defeat as the nearness to victory, leaving as ultimate result . . . the hope that Britain will have no heart to resist a third attempt than France the second . . . This all-embracing will to mastery, and the latent responsiveness of the German people, are the heart of the matter.'

These remarks are not quotations from General Smuts—or from Lord Vansittart—but from a dull, highly judicial, official publication of the Royal Institute of International Affairs. *The Problem of Germany*, as it is called, bears out all the main contentions of Lord Vansittart in his *Lessons of My Life*. If Lord Vansittart had been able to be pedestrian instead of brilliantly provocative in style his thesis, which is incontrovertible in recent history, would have commanded far wider assent. His courage in dealing with such difficult topics as the duty of Christian forgiveness for national crimes such as those of Germany is in refreshing contrast to more woolly-minded statesmen. Among these latter Mr. Wendell Willkie takes high rank, in his description of a rapid world-tour by aeroplane, entitled *One World*. He gives useful descriptions of the Russian and Chinese scenes he witnessed, but descends into unhelpful vagueness in discourses upon the 'liberalising' of the British Empire and the international good-will mission of the United States. To these two aspects of his book Professor Hancock's *Argument of Empire* and Mr. Walter Lippmann's *U.S. Foreign Policy* are valuable correctives, though the latter perhaps insists too much on the importance of British naval co-operation with the United States. This latter country, the second of the two world dominators mentioned by General Smuts, does not have the same massive political unity as the Soviet Union, for both political and economic reasons. There is a useful description, in Professor D. W. Brogan's *Politics and*

Law in the United States, of the complex Republican-Democratic rivalry in the U.S. which impairs its unity. There is no doubt that the intelligent English citizen regards with dismay some of the possible results of the automatic series of elections which reflect this division in American life. The future of our country in the after-war years will largely depend on the skilful use we make of the prestige we regained in 1940 and the political common-sense and experience we inherit from the past. We can do much to guide our two great allies, to control our mighty fallen enemy, to renew and gather together the nations who have fallen by the way. But all this will depend absolutely on maintaining an internal balance as we set our affairs in order, and the hope of our contributing to the formation of 'One World' will be destroyed if we do not retain our war-time character of a nation which is at one.

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THE BOOKS REFERRED TO :—

- Thoughts on the New World*. General Smuts. (Times Publishing Co.; 2d.)
- Britain's Third Chance*. Stephen King-Hall. (Faber; 8s. 6d.)
- Lessons of My Life*. Right Hon. Lord Vansittart. (Hutchinson; 9s. 6d.)
- The Problem of Germany*. (Royal Institute of International Affairs; 2s. 6d.)
- One World*. Wendell Willkie. (Cassell; 7s. 6d.)
- Argument of Empire*. W. K. Hancock. (Penguin Special; 9d.)
- U.S. Foreign Policy*. Walter Lippmann. (Hamish Hamilton; 6s.)
- Politics and Law in the United States*. D. W. Brogan. (C.U.P.; 3s. 6d.)