The International Review

Eduard Bernstein on Daudé-Bancel.


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Epicurus and War. Paul Hiestand.


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Misunderstandings.

A Letter from Vernon Lee.

What is peace made of? Alas, not of this sort of thing, I say to myself in reading the discussion between Dr. Messer and M. Romain Rolland. I have all the more right to do so because my philosophical and psychological studies have put me in the debt of Doctor Messer; and that years of growing admiration for Jean Christophe (I was one of the first to write about it in England) had prepared me for the deep sense of European fraternity now uniting me to the author of "Au dessus de la Mêlée". —

That such misunderstandings should arise between two men of such courageous goodwill, that they should arise of all things over the letters of his dead friend which Dr. Messer had printed and M. Rolland translated, each in a spirit of European brotherliness, is truly one of the most villainous jokes of the War Devil who at present rules our countries and hearts.

Let me premise that I know this matter only from your paper. But judging by what is before me, it must surely be plain, to every genuinely neutral reader that Dr. Messer is justified in denying M. Rolland's assertion that his dead friend's humane European horror at the war and his chivalrous appreciation of the French against whom he died fighting, contains any censure of his own country and government; and justified therefore in requesting M. Rolland to withdraw his statement to that effect. On the other hand that it is absurd of Dr. Messer to consider M. Rolland's interpretation of Klein's statements as an "arbitrary interpretation," and one sowing mistrust between nations" and "prolonging the war".

And it is all so natural! It is natural for a Frenchman, even for R. Rolland, convinced that his country is blameless, to imagine that horror and sorrow at the war must
mean, on the part of a German, recognition that the war was brought about by the German Government. And it is natural, that a German, even an eminent psychologist like Dr. Messer, should fail to recognise that such a misinterpretation is not intentional but inevitable.

Think of our poor little personal quarrels: Do we not always expect (as Shylock did!) that the "Daniel come to judgement" must, in refusing to condemn ourselves, quite evidently condemn our opponent? We are innocent and persecuted. We know it by the most irrefragable testimony, the testimony of our own habitual respect for justice, of our present overwhelming sense of injury. Here is honesty, wisdom, equanimity personified; can it possibly fail to see the case as we feel it — feel it in every bruised and poisoned fibre of us — to be? And when we are suddenly, told that although we may have our pound of flesh and enjoy it — (the satisfaction of seeing a German intellectual weep manly tears ever his quarrel with France) we are grievously disappointed on being refused the drop of blood, the drop of enemy's remorse, needed to slake our moral thirst.

If such is the psychology of quarrels in time of peace consider, dear Swiss Neutrals, how much more so, in time of war! For war would be impossible for ten minutes if we had not an atavism of the cannibal; and those among us who are horrified at the infliction of wounds and of bodily death, those who would feel degraded by enjoying a widow's or a mother's tears, yes, even the humanest and purest among us, do thirst in the secret of our soul for that drop of heart's blood drawn from an enemy by the knife of remorse. For man, as the Scriptures tell us, does not live by bread alone. He lives also by belief in his own poor self. And the less egoistic and conceited a man is, and the less his natural supply of that life-sustaining alcohol of self-satisfaction, the more he will seek for recognition, not of his own individual value, but for recognition of what constitutes his super-individual value, that of his nation, his religion, his principles, his ideals.
“Anima naturaliter christianam”, was the saint’s explanation of an honest pagan; he must secretly have renounced his idols. And similarly, perhaps, with M. Rolland, that most human and humane of modern saints. Since Albert Klein, killed last February by a French bullet or bayonet, had cursed this war and loved his French adversaries, why, clear-sighted and pure-hearted as he was (a twin-brother, a German Christophe to this French Olivier!), he must have seen, felt, recognised... what? well!, seen, felt, recognised what M. Rolland feels, sees, recognises.

But there is the very hic of the whole matter: when nations are opposed in hatred, what to one man is on the right is to the other on the left, although their figure, their attitude and gesture may be duplicates. Now in reality that such a man as Klein died fighting for Germany proves that he believed Germany to be more in the right than in the wrong. Such a man would have shot in the air, got himself shot by the officer or shot himself if he had not thought exactly the same things that M. Rolland thinks, only thought it about Germany, as M. Rolland does of France...

And then there is Dr. Messer spoiling his sober and humane letter with that absurd flourish (taken with absurd seriousness by M. Rolland) about such misinterpretations sharing the guilt of prolonging the war...

Guilt of prolonging the war! Oh, dear Neutrals is it not time, you should all cry “enough of this madness!” if not to the war, for I suppose you would if you could, at least to this sickening babble of guilt, introducing and prolonging it. Is it not time that you should proclaim that the guilt, if we must talk in such inappropriate theological and legal terms, is in the nature, the existence, the habit of warfare as such and in the conspiracy of folly, corruption and panic of every nation against itself and its neighbours. We, wretched XXth century savages, are living under a régime wherein war and its preparation, preparation in alliances, treaties, intrigues, as much as
in powder and shot, constitute the larger share of our national expenditure and the entire conception of our national safety and honour. And then, when these antiquated habits and modes of thought have, quite inevitably, plunged us into actual war, we set to reading white books and blue books and yellow and green and red, a complete prism of distorted history, in order to prove that this war (it may have been different in the past, under Napoleon, Pitt or the late Lord Palmerston!)... that this war at least is entirely the crime of one abominable adversary.

So long as such talk lasts there can be no peace in our polluted souls. No, not even in those of men like Rolland or Messer!

But you, Neutrals, who are not merely frightened or dramatically excited spectators, betting on one bleeding gladiator or hissing disapproval of the other; you genuine Neutrals should close your ears and pages to similar proceedings.

Let the International Review, founded to further peace, take example by the Women's Congress of the Hague, (since women have shown so much more practical sense and decency in war-time) and set a resolute veto to all such discussions, however slight and seemingly wide-minded, of this impossible subject of our various responsibilities. History, dear Neutrals, will see to that!

Then, are we all homines bonae voluntatis, whether neutral or belligerent, to sit in silence eating the heart out? Certainly not! You Neutrals, must prepare your mediation in this war admitting of no armistice and apparently, by a frightful irony, excluding all likelihood of complete victory and defeat, in this war whose course will become a slow competitive suicide ("the last man — the last shilling") only you, Neutrals, can discuss terms and explain the necessary reciprocal concessions on which alone future peace can be based. Work at that. Use your papers for that. And the International Review first and foremost. Let it become the "peace-exchange", where Swiss and
Scandinavians and Spaniards and Dutch and the Pope and the American President put out their unofficial feelers and expose to the criticism of belligerents the fruits of their public or private consultations.

And as regards us, poor peace-loving individuals of the various warring nations, let us prepare our own souls for the recognition of our own lapses from wisdom and justice, not in the violent present only but in the stealthy past which was its parent. Let each return to his peaceful interests. For the workman and the manufacturer and the merchant, picking up the broken threads of his livelihood, will recognise how his welfare is interwoven with that of the customers and purveyors from whom war has severed him. And as to us, intellectuals, why, if we return wholeheartedly to our art and to our science, we shall find our enemies, the beloved and loving enemies on the walls of our galleries and studios, on the desks of our pianos in the books by our bedside; and in every laboratory, handbook, every scientific or historical manual or review, every philanthropic report, we shall find, bearing enemy alien names, our comrades and masters, the rivals who have helped us by their rivalry, the pupils who will continue our work. It is in what has been done, and shall be done once more, in times of peace, that we can find salvation from what is being done, and for what, alas! is being thought and printed, in time of war.

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In connection with Vernon Lee's welcome suggestion it may be of interest to remark that the letter which we have now printed was written at the beginning of August, and the manuscript and proofs having been delayed in the post, we were not able to publish earlier.

We have no regular communication with America at all. Only a few benighted numbers ever arrive at their destinations, greater consignments are hopeless, as is often the case with letters too.

The Editor.

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