

American Sentiment and American Apathy

Until We Prove Our Resolution as Well as Our Reasonableness, Self-Congratulations Are Out of Order, Says Noted Author

By Agnes Repplier



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SENTIMENT! There is enough of it in the United States to fill all our own orders, to stock Europe, and to leave a surplus for Asia and Africa. We have choice varieties for every State in the Union; something warranted to please the genial South, the sensitive North, the complacent Middle West; and we have a mixed orange-peko blend which the whole country absorbs with gratification. Candidates, Congressmen, political bosses, orators upon every subject under Heaven deal with sentiment to the exclusion of realities, and with fantasies to the exclusion of facts.

There is one most popular watchword, good every day in the week, and in every township of the Republic. "We are at peace." "We are at peace with the whole world." The more we think about it the more self-congratulatory we become, the nobler and better we appear in our own eyes. We talk about our ocean boundaries as if we had wisely and with forethought created them, as if they were dikes which we had built to protect the sacred soil of freedom. We ask no paltry questions, such as "With whom should we be at war?" "Who wants to be at war with us?" "What should we be at war about?" We refrain for obvious reasons from dwelling too closely upon our relations with Mexico. If there are moments when the ingratitude of the noble Mexican freebooters (whom we armed) wounds our souls, and if there are other moments when the ingratitude of the arid Mexican academist (whom we placed in power) vexes our understandings, we stifle our scruples and appease our humiliation with the comfortable reflection, "We are at peace." It has been an uneasy and expensive peace, embracing many of the disadvantages of war; but we can, if we try, wax sentimental over it, and that is an inestimable gain.

Consider the frame of mind which finds expression in six smug verses, published in *The Survey*, set to the soothing music of "Auld Lang Syne," and called "The Land Where Hatred Dies."

War-racked and torn from sea to sea,
The Old World bleeding lies;
God called America to be
The land where hatred dies.

No tangled web of ancient wars
Her prayer for peace denies;
Great seas protect her fertile shores,
The land where hatred dies.

Unswayed amid a world insane
With wild alarms and cries,
Now may she calm in strength remain,
The land where hatred dies.

So France, fighting with her back to the wall for her homes and her freedom, is insane. Belgium, who held her word and her honor more sacred than safety

is insane. England, defending the principles of democracy to which—in theory—we stand committed, is insane. But America, coining her millions out of the war, giving little and getting much, building up her trade, and speculating dispassionately upon the art treasures which will be yielded up to her by impoverished Europe—America is the land selected by a partial Providence to play her safe and congenial rôle.

The assumption that the Almighty means us to do what we mean to do, that He is a silent partner in our game of life, is a base form of self-delusion. The New York State German Catholic Central Verein said in its report before the Central Verein convention in August:

While we most deeply regret that the hand of God rests so heavily upon mankind, we cannot deny to ourselves pleasure and satisfaction at the success of the German people.

This is being too much at home in Zion. That Germans should rejoice over the success of German arms is reasonable and right. No one expects them, or desires them, to feel otherwise. But their polite regret at the pressure exercised by Omnipotence seems somewhat out of place. It was not the hand of God which burned the churches of France and Belgium, which desecrated the altars unutterably sacred to all Catholics, which shot the priests, and carried shame to convents. Something fell heavily upon roofless church and ravaged home. Something falls heavily today upon the starving children of Poland and the deported women of Lille. But in the name of all that is holy, let us not call it the hand of God!

If the United States is a land where hatred dies, why are our industrial disputes settled by strikes to the accompaniment of violence? Are the soldiers who fire from trenches inspired by hatred, and the rioters who fire from curbstones inspired by brotherly love? How much blood has been spilled, how many "social war" crimes have been committed, how many workmen have been maimed, how much property has been destroyed in fifty years of strife between employers and employed! Is acquisitiveness a nobler spur than patriotism? Is caste a stronger bond than country?

When in August a body of 400,000 men "held up" a nation of 100,000,000; when the safety and prosperity of the country were put beyond the control of arbitration, and when a panic-stricken Congress, at the instance of a panic-stricken Administration, and with the consent of a panic-stricken Senate, threw the railroads' purse to the highwaymen, THE TIMES headed a column with these lines:

"Strike Would Hit City Babies First
Railway Workers to be Appealed to in
Name of Humanity to Run Milk
Trains."

"Appealed to!" "In Name of Humanity!" Last Winter the United States was appealed to by Germans who asked that we should persuade England to lift the embargo on milk lest German children should suffer. But England and Germany are at war. They make no pretense of fraternity. If American men are to be "appealed to" to permit American children to live, it is justice rather than hatred which dies in "God's own land."

We are also moderately discouraged to note that the "tangled web" of European war enmeshes us more than it has any right to do. A list of the outrages committed in American plants, on American docks, and on boats carrying American cargoes would stagger our belief in neutrality. The intricate plotting of foreign conspirators has kept our Secret Service on the jump, beguiled and baffled our detectives, and given our newspapers a new and animated field of action. "Bomb Plots" have long been a familiar feature of our morning news; and now that Robert Fay, former Lieutenant in the Germany Army, has escaped from

our feeble attempts to detain him they are likely to be more numerous than ever. Satan's proverbial facility in providing mischief for idle hands to do has been exemplified by the unholy activities of the North German Lloyd and Hamburg-American employees. Three hundred bombs, destined for thirty ships sailing from American ports, is a large order and might suggest to pessimistic minds that something in the nature of hatred had survived our enervating climate. The explosives placed under the Youngstown plant, the incendiary fire in the sugar ship *Inchmoor*, the incendiary fire on the cotton steamer *Bankdale*, the explosion of dynamite at Seattle—these are merely individual features of a vast conspiracy as insolvent as it is infamous. Every deed of violence planned and executed by an alien, and aimed at the commerce of the United States, is more than a crime against our laws; it is a defiance flung full in the face of our Government. Such shameful and humiliating wrongs inspire our just resentment. They burn into our souls and leave us scant margin for sentimental complacency.

There is much in the great war to arouse high and keen emotions. There is much to awaken pity and to inspire humble reverence of soul. But it is worthy of note that no one incident has so loosened the floodgates of American sentiment as the execution of Sir Roger Casement—"Sir Roger Casement, Martyr," as he has been styled not only in the German press, (and Germany has made enough martyrs to understand the meaning of the term,) but in the neutral newspapers of the United States. Are we to understand that if Bavarians had plotted an uprising against Prussia, with the connivance of England, it would not have been punished as treason? Would Berlin have sympathized with its leader, as an "idealist and a martyr," or have harshly condemned him to a traitor's death?

The raising of the standard of revolt by the Sinn Fein in Dublin was a lamentable rather than an ignoble deed. Liberty was the watchword of these rebels, the delay of home rule was their grievance, the contemptuous animosity of Ulster (which had grievances of its own) was the sting within their breasts. We can always understand the smoldering resentment which flames into rebellion. But that there should have lived a British subject who, under the stress of any grievance, would have allied himself with Germany is incredible. It has the suffocating, imbecile horror of a nightmare. Germany whose hands are red with Irish blood; Germany who has defiled the churches sacred to the Irishman's creed; Germany who drowned the women and children of the *Lusitania* like so many rats, and without pausing to ask whether such vermin were English, Irish, or American!

The wrong done to England by this mad conspiracy was trifling. The wrong done to Ireland was beyond the reach of healing. When German soldiers bade Irish soldiers leave their ranks and go over to the enemy, what shame must have filled those valiant hearts! Men who had fought with intrepidity from the beginning of the war were confidently asked to play the part of traitors and deserters. They answered with imprecations which were blotted out from the recording angel's book.

We are bidden to remember—always to remember—that Sir Roger Casement was not English. Mr. Quinn, writing in *The Times*, speaks of England as Casement's "technical" country, and of King George as his "technical" sovereign. Mr. Nevinson, writing in *The Atlantic Monthly*, says that Casement had not merely ceased to regard himself as a British subject, but that he had never regarded himself as a British subject. Yet he had represented Great Britain in the *Cocoa Islands*, on the *Congo*, at *Delagoa Bay*, and

in *Brazil*. He had accepted knighthood from a British monarch, and a pension from the British Government. That he had merited these rewards no one is disposed to doubt; but surely some pretense of loyalty went with their acceptance. A man who is pensioned by the Pennsylvania Railroad for good service may not feel himself under any obligation to the road. He knows, and the world knows, that he has worked for his independence. He is not expected to dilate with gratitude; but neither is he expected to blow up the company's cars and to use his pension money to buy dynamite. If he does these things he is called, and rightly called, a traitor.

That Casement, whose heart had been wrung by the cruelty and injustice he witnessed in Africa, should have felt no concern for the cruelty and injustice practiced in France and Belgium, and no shadow of mistrust or distaste for their perpetrators, is beyond our comprehension. That Americans should be so profoundly stirred by the execution of a traitor—however engaging his qualities—and remain unmoved by the execution of a brave and honest sailor, whose crime was the defense of the ship committed to his care, is equally unaccountable. It is not likely that, after the pitiful failure of the conspiracy he fostered, Sir Roger Casement wanted to live. Death was his kindest friend. There is a noble old Spanish ballad which tells how the Lord of Butrago refused to leave the lost battlefield because he could not endure that the wives of his vassals should point to him as one who had saved his own life where their husbands had perished. No leader of an uprising can want to survive its miserable collapse. No man who was even "technically" a British subject, and who had sold his faith to Germany, could have faced the consequences of his deed. His own better nature would have made life an intolerable thing. The thought of the homes he had ruined would have embittered his soul, even if, by a miracle of faith, he could have preserved his confidence in the liberating friendship of Berlin.

But Captain Fryatt stood up and was shot because he had done his duty. Doing one's duty is such a plain and simple thing that no one is prepared to wax sentimental over it, or over its consequences. American lawyers have been interested in the case as a matter of international law. The American public has been faintly interested in the case, because something of the same kind may one day befall a Yankee skipper. But it does not occur to German or American pressmen to call Captain Fryatt "idealist and martyr." The German view of the submarine is that it is a sacred thing, in perfect accord with the designs of Providence, and above the laws of nations, or of humanity. When a submarine sinks a merchantman or a liner, it does not, as Count Bernstorff politely points out, "violate any existing rule"—which is a great comfort all around. But when a merchantman tries to escape by ramming a submarine, all rules, real and imaginary, are so grossly violated that only the shooting of the merchantman's Captain as a guerrilla can restore international equilibrium. "Germany," observes Professor Munroe Smith, "is endeavoring to remodel the existing code of naval warfare in its own immediate interest, and by its sole authority."

To some minds the image of a sea Captain gallantly defending his ship from assault is an inspiring one. This is what we should expect an American sailor to do. To some minds the image of the same Captain, captured many months later, and shot in cowardly revenge for his bravery, is more poignant than the death of a dozen traitors. Captain Fryatt was probably well content to die. If the faces of his English children came too persistently between him and the German guns, he knew that he left them a heritage of honor, a name that they could repeat to their children's children with justifiable pride. There

are worse things than dying in a strange and hostile land, if one dies bravely, with clean hands and a good record. Sir Francis Doyle, whose love for courage and loyalty was of that simple character, discarded by our complex generation, has immortalized the "Private of the Buffs," a soldier named Moyse, who was done to death as revengefully in China as Captain Fryatt was done to death in Germany:

Today before the foeman's frown
He stands in Elgin's place,
Ambassador from Britain's crown,
And type of all her race.

If Irishmen in the United States can reverence nothing British, let them honor the memory of two Irish soldiers, Private Patrick Moran of the Connaught Rangers and Private William Devlin of the Munster Fusiliers. These men were prisoners in Germany. These men were offered their liberty and invited to join Sir Roger Casement's expedition. These men refused, and were shot. When we are handing out halos to "martyrs," why are not Moran and Devlin candidates for decoration?

And now, at this stage of the game, along comes Professor Münsterberg, who has dropped the threatening tone of his earlier manifestos, who makes no alluding to the "crushing power" of the German vote, which, less than two years ago, he wielded like a battleaxe over our heads, and who sings sweetly with a siren note of the love which Germany, England, and the United States are coyly concealing from one another. As a combination of mind reader and prophet, Professor Münsterberg stands without a peer. He has made a rash boast of his hypnotic powers, assuring the Harvard Summer School that they were irresistible; and perhaps he is now engaged in hypnotizing nations. When England has been strafed into yielding up her mature

affections to the imperial suitor who woos her as William of Normandy wooed his Matilda, then the virginal heart of the United States will be more easily won. The elder bride will bring the sea for a dowry, the younger the trade of half a hemisphere; and in return for these wedding portions the Kaiser will, with his strong right arm, protect England from Russia, and the United States from Japan. It is such a picture as only the German academic mind could conceive. It has all the vraisemblance of the German academic camel, and all its practical utility.

France, beloved of the nations, is to be excluded from the nuptial chamber. Three is company in this case, and four a crowd. Old friendships and old animosities will go to the scrapheap together. Only old bugbears will be tenderly preserved, to frighten the clinging consorts, and show them the value of a champion. The Slavic peril, that ogre of our infancy, and the less tangible horror which another German professor strikingly calls "the coming onrush of the rumbling, yellow race wave"—these are the apparitions which are expected to strike terror into the hearts of the English-speaking race, and compel it to seek a protector.

What does not occur to Professor Münsterberg, or to any German mind, is that the present war has forever altered our standards of civilization and of frightfulness. We can never go back to the old ones. Russia deported numbers of Jews, and it was a cruel thing to do. But Turkey, with the connivance of her Christian ally, Germany, who refused to interfere, has murdered so many thousands of Armenians that Russia's restricted inhumanities have been cast forever in the shade. Moreover, Russia gave to the exiled Jews some chance to realize on their property, and always

the sad comfort of clinging to one another for support—fathers and sons and husbands protecting daughters and mothers and wives. The Germans deported twenty-five thousand non-combatants from Lille and nearby towns, with no warning save the announcement on placards that they were to be sent away at the discretion of their masters, with no knowledge permitted them of their destinations, with no possessions save scanty bundles of clothes and household utensils, and with no pretense of protection from possible ill-treatment and shame. Ten thousand women, picked out at random by inspecting officers, were taken from their homes as unconcernedly as if captured Lille had been captured Troy. It was an unusual incident to be witnessed by the twentieth century, and inclines us to think we will take our chances with the "onrush of the rumbling yellow race wave," rather than with the superkultur of the superman.

Another point overlooked, and very naturally overlooked, by Professor Münsterberg is that Great Britain is a democratic country. The temper of the people must always be reckoned with. Now diplomats forget quickly. It is an art they set themselves to learn. But the people forget very, very slowly. Not in two or three generations will the hatred engendered by injustice and inhumanity be blotted out from their tenacious memories. What Spain was to England in the sixteenth century, what France was to England in the eighteenth century, Germany is, and will be, to England in the twentieth century. She has done everything in her power to win the abhorrence of British democracy; she has gone out of her way—as in the shooting of Captain Fryatt and Edith Cavell—to enrage and insult the British public; and a German professor (who has plainly never heard of Jenkinson's

ear) talks glibly about Great Britain and Germany as allies of the future. No liberal government can count on its people as pawns in the game it plays. In August, 1914, I asked a Roman banker how Italy would stand. "Italy answers that question," he said. "Our diplomats make treaties, but our people fight; and no power under Heaven could compel Italian soldiers to fight by Austria's side."

And the United States? Well, we too have our grievances and our aspirations. We too are a democratic country, with a healthy memory for friendship and for wrongs. Russia was very rude to us about our passports; and Great Britain (though it is by her help we have minted our millions during the war) has lacked consideration for our mail and our exported "luxuries." But neither Great Britain nor Russia has dynamited our property and murdered our citizens. True, Germany has signified her readiness to overlook the Lusitania incident, and expects us to do likewise. True, she will probably refrain, when she is our ally, from blowing up our cargoes. These are graceful concessions. Pacifists and sentimentalists may make the most of them. But hard-headed Americans think that Berlin should pull her chestnuts as best she can out of the fire she has kindled. After all, we are a grown-up nation. If we cannot now protect our own possessions, our own industries, and our own citizens, we never will be able to protect them. If we cannot now trade with Europe, preserve the respect of Japan, keep Mexico in order, and meet an industrial, as well as an international, crisis with courage and a sense of honor, we never will be able to do these things. And until we prove our resolution as well as our reasonableness, sentimentality is out of place, and self-congratulations out of order. The time for singing hymns to ourselves has plainly not yet come.