

CHESTERTON VOICES HIS PROTEST AGAINST GERMAN FUTURE FOR EUROPE

Brilliant English Literary Man Expresses Reasons for His Belief in the Righteousness of English Attitude in Present Struggle in Three Letters to an Italian Artist.

Regards Prussians as Devoid of Everything That Makes for Real Civilization—Calls Their Culture Second Rate—Failures in All Points But the Enforcing of Obedience.

Of course when folks are engaged in war, their angry passions cannot be presented from rising. The three letters published below constitute an apt illustration.

It is not probable that Gilbert K. Chesterton, their author, really thinks as poorly of the Prussians, English to the core though to be, as his slashing attack on their intelligence and modes of thought makes it appear.

His animadversions, however, are interesting not only as showing the attitude of a certain type of cultivated Englishman toward their present foes, but also as illustrating the ratiocinations of a very brilliant intellect, heated white by anger.

The letters are addressed to an anonymous Italian acquaintance, evidently a painter and a veteran of the mid-century struggle for "United Italy."

They were published in this country by The New York Times from which The News copies them.

Italy, twice has thou spoken; and time is athirst for the third.—Swimburne.

My Dear — It is a long time since we met, and I fear these letters may never reach you. But in these violent times I remember with a curious vividness how you brandished a paint brush about your easel when I was a boy, and how it thrilled me to think that you had so brandished a bayonet against the Teutons—I hope with the same precision and happy results. Round about that period the very pigments seemed to have some sort of picturesque connection with your national story. There seem to be something gorgeous and terrible about Venetian Red; and something quite catastrophic about Burnt Sienna. But somehow or other, when I saw in the street yesterday the colors on your flag, it reminded me of the colors on your palette.

You need not fear I shall try to entangle you or your countrymen in the matters which it is for Italians alone to decide. You know the perils of either course much better than do I, Italy, most assuredly, has no need to prove her courage. She has risked everything in standing out that she could risk by coming in. The proclamations and press of Germany make it plain that the Germans have risen to a height of sensibility hardly to be distinguished from madness. Supposing the nightmare of a Prussian victory, they will revenge themselves on things more remote than the Triple Alliance. There was a promise of peace between them and Belgium; there was none between them and England. The promise to Belgium they broke. The promise of England they invented. It is called the Treaty of Tontonium. No one ever heard of it in this country, but it seems well known in academic circles in Germany. It seems to be something connected with the color of one's hair. But I repeat that I am not concerned to interfere with your decision, save in so far as I may provide some materials for it by describing our own.

Great Britain at Last United. For I think the first, perhaps the only fruitful work an Englishman can do now for the formation of foreign opinions is to talk about what he really understands, the condition of British opinion. It is as simple as it is solid. For the first time, perhaps, what we call United Kingdom entirely deserves its name. There has been nothing like such unanimity within an Englishman's recollection. The Irish, and even the Welsh, were largely pro-Boers; so were some of the most English of the English. No one could have been more English than Fox, yet he denounced the war with Napoleon. No one could be more English than Cobden, but he denounced the war in the Crimea. It is really extraordinary to find a united England. Indeed, lately, it was extraordinary to find a united Englishman. Those of us who, like the present writer, repudiated the South African war from its beginning, had yet a divided heart in the matter, and felt certain aspects of it as glorious as well as infamous. The first fact I can offer you is the unquestionable fact that all these doubts and divisions have ceased. Nor have they ceased by any compromise, but by universal flash of faith—or, if you will, of suspicion. Nor were our internal conflicts lightly abandoned, nor our reconciliations an easy matter. I am, as you are, a democrat and a citizen of Europe; and my friends and I had grown to loathe the plutocracy and privilege which sat in the high places of our country with a loathing which we thought no love could cast out.

Of these rich men I will not speak of them. War is a terrible business in any case, and to some intellectual temperaments this is the most terrible part of it. That war takes the young; that war sunders the lovers; that all over Europe brides and bridegrooms are parting at the church door—all that is only a commonplace to commonplace people. To give up one's love for one's country is very great. But to give up one's hate for one's country, this may also have in it something of pride and something of purification.

Burying Ancient Grudges. What it is that has made the British peoples thus defer not only their artificial parade of party politics, but

their real social and moral complaints and demands? What is it that has united all of us against the Prussian as against a mad dog? It is the presence of a certain spirit, as unmistakable as a pungent smell, which we feel is capable of withering all the good things in this world. The burglary of Belgium, the bribe to betray France, these are not excuses; they are facts. But they are only the facts by which we came to know of the presence of the spirit. They do not suffice to define the whole spirit itself. A good rough summary is to say that it is the spirit of barbarism; but indeed it is something worse. It is the spirit of second-rate civilization and the most distraction involves the most important differences. Granted that it could exist, pure barbarism could not last long; as pure babyhood cannot last long. Of his own nature the baby is interested in the ticking of a watch; and the time will come when you will have to tell him, if you only tell him the wrong time. And that is exactly what the second-rate civilization does.

But the vital point is here. The abstract barbarism would copy. The cockney and incomplete civilization always sets itself up to be copied. And in the case here considered the German thinks that it not only his business to spread education, but to spread compulsory education. "Science combined with organization," says Prof. Oswald of Berlin University, "makes us terrible to our opponents and insures a German future for Europe." That is, as shortly as it can be put what we are fighting about. We are fighting to prevent a German future for Europe. We think it would be narrower, nastier, less sane, less capable of liberty and of laughter than any of the worst parts of the European past. And when I cast about for a form in which to explain shortly why we think so, I thought of you. For this is a matter so large that I know not how to express it except in terms of artists like you, in the service of beauty and the faith in freedom. Prussia, at least cannot, help me; Lord Palmerston, I believe, called it a country of damned professors. Lord Palmerston, I fear used the word "damned" more or less flippantly. I use it reverently.

Germany's "Diseased Egotism." Rome, at her very weakest, has always been a river that wanders and widens and that waters many fields. Berlin, at its strongest, will never anything but a whirlpool, which seeks its own center, and is sucked down. It would only narrow all the rest of Europe, as it has already narrowed all the rest of Germany. There is a spirit of diseased egotism which at least makes all things spin upon one pin point in the brain. It is a spirit expressed more often in the slangs than in the tongues of men. The English call it a fad. I do not know what the Italians call it. The Prussians call it philosophy.

Here is the sort of instance that made me think of you. What would you, for instance, let us say, if I mentioned Michael Angelo? At the present moment, perhaps, boredom, such as I feel when Americans ask me about Stratford-on-Avon. But, supposing that just fear quieted, you would feel what I and every one else can feel. It might be that huge heave of filanctic hands of Man upon the locks of the doors of life; large and terrible hands, like those of that youth who poises the stone above Florence and looks out upon the circle of the hills. It might be that huge heave of flank and chest and throat in "The Slave," which is like an earthquake lifting a whole landscape. It might be that tremendous Madonna, whose charity is more strong than death. Anyhow your thoughts would be something worthy of the man's terrible Paganism and his more terrible Christianity. Who but God could have graven Michael Angelo, who came so near to graving the Mother of God?

Prussians Claim Michael Angelo. German culture deals with the matter as follows: "Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564).—(Bernhard) ancestor of the family, lived in Florence about 1210. He had two sons, Berlinghieri and Buonarroti. By this name, recurring frequently in later generations, the family came to be called. It is a German name, compounded of Bona (=Bohn) and Hrodo, Roto (=Rohde, Rothe) Bona and Roto are cited as Lombard names. Buonarroti is perhaps the old Lombard Beonard, corresponding to the word Bonroth. Corresponding names are Mackroth, Osteroth, Leonard." And so on, and so on, and so on. "In his face he has always been well colored... the eyes might be called small rather than large, of the color of horn, but variable with 'flecks' of yellow and blue. Hair and beard are black. These particulars are confirmed by the portraits. First and foremost, take the portrait by Burgardini, in the Museo Buonarroti. Here comes to view the 'flecked' appearance of the iris, especially in the right eye. The left may be described as almost wholly blue." And so on, and so on, and so on. "In the Museo Civico at Pavia, is a fresco likeness by an unknown hand, in which this fresh red is distinctly recognizable on the face. Taking all these bodily characteristics into consideration, it must be said from an anthropological point of view that though originally of German family he was a hybrid between the North and West brunette race."

Would you take that trouble to prove that Michael Angelo was an Italian? This man takes to prove that he was a German? Of course not. The only impression this man (who is a recognized Prussian historian) produces on your minds or mine is that he does not care about Michael Angelo. For you being an Italian, are therefore something more than an Italian; and I, being an Englishman, something more than an Englishman. But this poor fellow really cannot be anything more than a Prussian. He digs and digs to find dead Prussians in the catacombs of Rome or under the ruins of Troy. If he can find one blue eye lying about somewhere he is satisfied. He has no philosophy. He has a hobby, which is collecting Ger-

mans. It would probably be vain for you and me to point out that we could prove anything by the sort of ingenuity which finds the German "rothe" in Buonarroti. We could have great fun depriving Germany of all her geniuses in that style. We could say that Moltke must have been an Italian, from the old Latin root not indicating the sweetness of that General's disposition. We might say Bismarck was a Frenchman, since his name begins with the popular theatrical cry of "Bis!" We might say Goethe was an Englishman, because his name begins with the popular sporting cry "Go!" But the ultimate difference between us and the Prussian professor is simply that we are not mad.

Typical of Prussian Egotism. The father of Frederick the Great, the founder of the more modern Hohenzollerns, was mad. His madness consisted of stealing giants, like an unscrupulous traveling showman. Any man much over six feet tall, whether he were called the Russian Giant or the Irish Giant of the Hottentot Giant, was in danger of being kidnapped and imprisoned in a Prussian uniform. It is the same mean sort of madness that is working in Prussian professors such as the one I have quoted. They can get no further that the notion of stealing giants. I will not bore you now with all the other giants they have tried to steal; it is enough to say that St. Paul, Leonardo da Vinci, and Shakespeare himself are among the monstrosities exhibited at Frederick William fair—on grounds as good as those quoted above. But I have put this particular case before you as an artist rather than an Italian to show what I mean when I object to a "German future for Europe."

I object to something which believes very much in itself, and in which I do not in the least believe. I object to something which is uneducated and smallminded, but which also has that kind of pertinacity which always belongs to lunatics. It wants to be able to congratulate itself on Michael Angelo; never to congratulate the world. It is the spirit that can be seen in those who go bald trying to trace a genealogy, or go bankrupt trying to make out a claim to some remote estate.

The Prussian has the inconsistency of the parvenu; he will labor to prove that he is related to some gentleman of the Renaissance, even while he boasts of being able to "buy his way up." If the Italians were really great, why—they were really Germans; and if they weren't really Germans, well, then, they weren't really great. It is an accusation for an old maid.

Three of four hundred years ago, in the sad silence that had followed the comparative failure of the whole effort of the Middle Ages, there came upon all Europe a storm out of the south. Its tumult is of many tongues; one can hear in it the laughter of Rabelais, or, for that matter, the lyric of Shakespeare, but the dark heart of the storm was indeed more austere and volcanic, a noise of thunderous wings and the name of Michael the Archangel. And when it had shocked and purified the world and passed, a Prussian professor found a feather fallen to earth, and proved (in several volumes) that it could only have come from a Prussian Eagle. He had seen one—in a cage. Yours — G. K. CHESTERTON.

SECOND LETTER

My Dear — The facts before all Europeans today are so fundamental that I still find it easier to talk about them to you as to an old friend, rather than put it in the shape of a pamphlet. In my last letter I pointed out two facts which are pivots. The first is that, to any really cultured person, Prussia is second rate. The second is that to almost any Prussian Prussia is really first rate, and is prepared, quite literally, to police the rest of the world.

For the first matter the comparative inferiority of German culture cannot be doubted by people like you. One of the German papers pathetically said that, though the mangling of Malines and Rheims was very sad, it was a comfort to think that yet nobler works of art would spring up wherever the German culture had passed in triumph. From the point of view of humor, it is really rather sad that they never will. The German emperor's idea of a Gothic cathedral as provocative to the fancy as Mrs. Toder's idea of a wooden tower is not, I think it perfectly probable that they really intended to set up such beautiful buildings as they could. Having been blasphemous enough to ruin such things, they might well be blasphemous enough to replace them.

Even if the Prussian attempt on Paris had not wholly collapsed as it was, I doubt whether the Prussians would have destroyed everything. I doubt whether they would even have destroyed the Venus de Milo. More probably they would have put a pair of arms on it, dated by some rising German artist—the emperor or somebody. And the two arms thus added would look at once like the arms of a woman at a washbasin. The destroyers of the tower of Babelius are quite capable of destroying the Tower of Giotto. But they are equally capable of the greater crime of completing it. And if they put on a spire, what a spire! It would be what an extinguisher for that clear and almost transparent Christian candle! Have you read some of the German explanations of Hamlet? Did I tell you that Leonardo's hair must have been German hair, because so many of his contemporaries said it was beautiful? This is what I call being second rate. All the German excitement about the colonies of England is only a half understanding of what was once heroic and is now largely caddish. The German emperor's naval vision is a bad copy of Nelson, as certainly as Frederick the Great's verses were a bad copy of Voltaire.

But the second point was even more important; that weak as the thing is mentally it is strong materially if we permit it. The Prussians have failed in everything else, but they have not failed in getting their subject thousands to do as they are told. They cannot put up black and white towers in Florence, but they can really put up white and black posts in Alsace. They have failed in diplomacy, I suppose it might be called a failure in diplomacy to come into the fight with two enemies ex-

tra and one ally the less. If the Germans, instead of sending spies to study the Belgian soil, had sent spies to consider the Belgian soul, they would have been saved hard work for a week or two.

They have failed in controversy. I suppose it might be called a failure in controversy to say that England may be keeping her word for some wicked purpose, while Germany may be breaking her word for some noble purpose. And that is practically all that the Germans can manage to say. They say that we are an insatiable, unscrupulous, piratical power and this wild spirit whirled us into the mad course of respecting a treaty we had signed. They can find in us no treason except that we keep our treaties; failing to do this I call failing in controversy.

They have failed in popular persuasion. They have had a very good opportunity. The British empire does contain many people who have been badly treated in various ways—the Irish, the Boers, nay, the Americans themselves, whose national existence began with being badly treated. With these the Prussians have done comparatively little, and with Europeans of your sort nothing. They have never really sympathized with the feel of a Switzer for Switzerland; the feeling of a Norwegian for Norway, the feeling of a Tuscan for Tuscany. Even when nations are neutral, Prussia can hardly bear them to be patriotic. Even when they are courting every one else they can praise no one but themselves. They fail in diplomacy, they fail in debate, they fail even in demagoguery. They have stupid plots, stupid explanations, and even stupid apologies. But there is one thing they really do not fail in. They do not fail in finding people stupid enough to carry them out.

Now, it is this question: I would ask you to consider you as a good middle type of the Latins, a liberal but a Catholic, an artist but a soldier. The danger to the whole civilization of which Rome was the fountain lies in this. That the more this strange Pruss people fall in all the other things, the more they will fall back on this mere fact of a brutal obedience. They will give orders; they have nothing else to give. I say that this is the question for you; I do not say, I do not dream of saying, that the answer is for me. It is for you to weigh the chance that their very failures in the arts of peace will drive them back upon the arts of war. They could not, and they did not, duped you people in diplomacy. They did the most undiplomatic thing that can be done; they concealed a breach of partnership without even concealing the concealment. They instigated the intrigue in Austria in such a way that Italy could honestly claim all the freedom of past ignorance, combined with all the disillusionment of present knowledge. They so ran the triple alliance that they had to admit your grievance at the very moment when they claimed your aid.

The English are sturdier and less sensitive than you are; but even the English found the German chancellor's diplomacy not insinuating, but simply insulting; I swear I would be a better diplomatist myself. The same way, there is no danger of people like you being corrupted in complete. There is no fear that the professors who pillulate all over the Baltic plain will overcome the Latins to logical superlogism and say they are too big for syllogisms, generally having found even one syllogism too big for them. If they complain either of your abstention from their cause or your adherence to any other you have an unanswerable answer. You will say, as you did say, that you did not break the triple alliance, even for the sake of peace. It was they who broke it for the sake of war. You, obviously, had as much right to be consulted about Serbia as Austria had; and on the mere chessboard of argument it is mate in one move.

Nor are they in the least fitted to make an appeal to the popular sentiment of your people. The English, I dare say, and the French have talked an amazing amount of nonsense about you, but they understand a little better. They do not write exactly like this, which is from the most public and accepted Prussian political philosopher, (Chamberlain): "Who can live in Italy today and mix with its amiable and highly gifted inhabitants without feeling with pain that here a great nation is lost, irredeemably lost, because it lacks the inner driving power," etc., which has brought you Klebs' triumphant march through Paris. Even a half-educated Englishman, who has heard of no Italian poet except Dante, knows that he was something more than amiable. Even a positively illiterate Frenchman, who has heard of no Italian warrior except Napoleon, knows that it was in "inner driving force" that the artilleryman in question was deficient. "Who can live in Italy today?" Evidently the Prussian philosopher can't. His impressions are taken from Italian opera, not from Italian streets, certainly not from Italian fields, which is a matter of fact such images of Italy burn in the memories of most open-minded northerners who have been there, are of exactly the other kind. I for one should be inclined to say: "Who can live in Italy today without feeling that a woman feding children or a man chopping wood, may almost touch him with fear with the fullness of their humanity; so that he can almost smell blood, as one smells burning?" Italian often look lazy; that is, they look as if they would not move; but not as if they could not move, as many Germans do. But even though this formula fitted the Italians, it seems scarcely calculated to please them.

For the Prussians, then, with the failure of their diplomacy, the failure of their philosophy, we may also place the failure of their appeals to a foreign people. The Prussian writer may continue his attempts to soothe and charm you by telling you that you are irredeemably lost, and that all great Italians must have been something else. But the method seems to me ill-adapted to popular propaganda, and I cannot but say that on this third point of persuasion the German attempt is not striking.

Now, all this is important for this reason. If you consider it carefully you will see why Europe must, at whatever cost, break Germany in but they can really put up white and black posts in Alsace. They have failed in diplomacy, I suppose it might be called a failure in diplomacy to come into the fight with two enemies ex-

land or the giants of Patagonia, it must be done. And the reason, is that unless it is literally and materially done, other things will be literally and materially done; and horridly the heavens. They will be silly things; they will be benighted and limited and laughable things. Nothing could be more ridiculous, if that is all, than the moral position of the Prussians in Poland, where a magnificent officer, making a vast parade of "ruling" tries to cheat poor peasants out of their fields (and gets cheated) and then takes refuge in beating little boys for saying their prayers in their native tongue. All who remember anything of dignity, of irony, in short, of Rome and reason, can see why an officer need not, should not, had better not, and generally does not beat little boys; but a Prussian officer will go on doing it until you take away the stick.

Nothing could be more comic, if that is all than the position of Prussians in Alsace, which they declare to be purely German and admit to be furiously French; so that they have to terrorize it by sabring anybody, including cripples. Again, any of us can see why an officer need not, should not, had better not, and generally does not sabre a cripple; but a Prussian officer will go on doing it until you take away the sabre. It is this insane and rigid realism that of a Chinaman copying something, or a half-witted servant taking a message. If they had the power to put black and white posts around the grave of Virgil, or dig up Dante to see if he had yellow hair, the mere thing of it, which for some of us would be the most unlikely, would for them be the least unlikely thing.

They do not hear the laughter of the ages. If they had the power to treat the English or Italian premier quite literally as a traitor, and shoot him against a wall, they are quite capable of turning such hysterical rhetoric into reality, and scattering his brains before they had collected their own. They do not feel at all as they are all a little short-sighted. They are annoyed when their enemies, after such experiences as those of Belgium, accuse them of breaking their promises. And in one sense they are right, for there are some sorts of promises they would probably keep. If they promise to respect a free country,

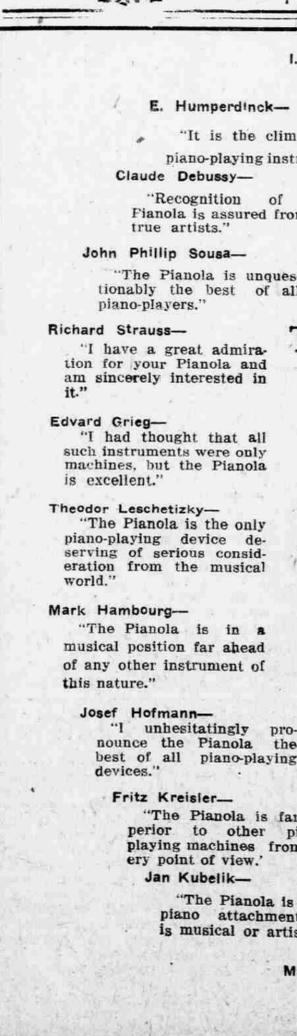
(Continued on Page 16.)

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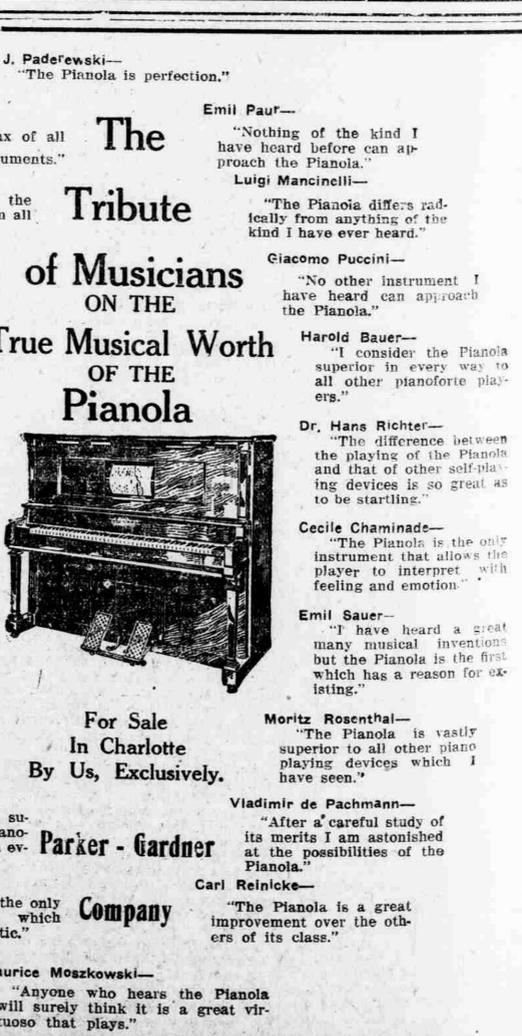
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