

## *PATRIOTISM*

**N**APOLEON once said the love of country was the first virtue of civilized man. Opinions differ as to the desirability, one may say the "virtuousness," of some virtues, but in all ages the patriot has been one whom men have delighted to honour.

Yet though all agree that "Patriotism" is a great good, the word itself is travestied almost as frequently as other great words, e.g. "Mysticism," "Rights," etc. etc.

One conception there is, beautiful, poetical, and partially true; it is the more emotional love of country, one may say of the material country, its hills and glens, plains and streams, and along with these go its traditions, all for which it stands. Men look up to their land as something which possesses them, to which they owe fealty, the land of their fathers, the cradle of their race, the beloved spot of Mother Earth round which clings all that mysterious something which makes "home." It is an intense absorbing love which passes into a kind of worship, which produces the national literature of a country; it is the sentiment with which the Frenchman speaks of "La France," the Italian of "Italia," the Irishman of "Erin," the Scot of "Bonnie Scotland," and the Englishman, too, of his "Motherland" (though he can call it "Blighty" and looks upon it rather as a cherished and priceless possession than as a goddess with the right to command his all). A certain proportion of such affection must exist in all Patriotism, but the thing itself is more than this.

Then we have a variety which may be expressed in the phrase, "My Country right or wrong"—again there is the partial truth. It is this sentiment which will cause men to go and die in their country's last

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ditch and women to stand by, dry-eyed and bid them go. There is a gallantry, an enthusiasm, an "abandon" in it which appeals to something in wayward human nature, and it goes far to explain the phenomenon of good and just men fighting in a bad and unjust war. It is illogical, it may be reprehensible, carried out to its logical conclusion it may lead to positive immorality, but it is a point of view.

To arrive at a complete definition we must go further and consider that by "Country" we mean more than the land in itself. We have, in fact, whatever we may do in theory, to consider the government inseparably with the country; we have to consider "the State," the aggregation of human beings with all its actualities and potentialities, and it is there that the matter becomes complicated, for there come in all the limitations, the follies, the sins, of fallen human nature.

Because of the difficulties involved we have the counterfeit of Patriotism-Jingoism, and though, if we examine closely, Jingoism is but the fool in the king's vesture, on a hasty examination the counterfeit may easily pass for the reality. Jingoism is more blatant, more sentimental, more self-satisfied, and seemingly confident; there is a certain glorious arrogance about it; it is full of the pride of life and it has a surface attraction. Often it finds expression in a loudly-declared desire for the power and prosperity of the country, at no matter what cost to others. The Jingoist sings bravely that he and his countrymen never shall be slaves, but they may have no insuperable objection to enslaving outsiders. He believes, more or less, that his country has a divine right to conquer the world, he talks and thinks much about her rights, less about her duties; so much for the most elementary form of pseudo-Patriotism. But it may not stop at being merely noisy, it may be very unjust. If

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widely prevalent, the country accepting it will become a menace to its neighbours. The practical results will be acts of aggression, and an irritating, provocative attitude which will gall the pride of other nations and lead first to jealousy, then to war.

History teems with examples : Charles XII of Sweden, on fire for conquest, provoked wars, refused mediation, carried on his short, fierce career of aggrandizement and military splendour, whilst himself admitting that kings such as he were curses to their realms. Napoleon plunged Europe into horror unequalled, spilt blood like water, sacrificed untold lives, trampled upon all authority and justice, spiritual and temporal ; yet what of that " Napoleonic Legend " which has so coloured French and even foreign literature ? What of Frederick the Great, nay, to come home, what of gallant Henry V ? Agincourt sounds magnificent to national pride, but what of its outcome—the long misery of later years, the civil strife, the regicide, the paving of the way for future tyranny, the sorrows of " the meek usurper," the martyrdom of the Maid of Orleans ?

But there is a worse form of pseudo-Patriotism and a more subtle—" State Worship." We may have this in any type of State : republic is no safer than monarchy. It consists in a deadly misapprehension of the virtue of Patriotism ; sometimes the victims may really be blind to the wrong, sometimes they suspect its presence but dare not look, for absolute loyalty precludes criticism. Sometimes it has flourished under a regime called " Divine Right "—a right that was rather, in Carlyle's phrase, a " diabolic wrong "—once it called itself by the less sinister-sounding title, " Benevolent Despotism." How many sins against the liberty of the subject, how many outrages have been borne in silence, not only endured, but accepted and justified, because Patriotism was interpreted as

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absolute loyalty to the supreme secular rule—and the King could do no wrong? But worse still is the case when there is not even the redeeming human touch of a human monarch, when men raise a bloodless, lifeless, hideous fetish and label it “the State,” when the idea spreads abroad that loyalty must mean the sacrifice of man’s liberty, the throwing of all his natural rights beneath the juggernaut wheels of a tyranny the more horrible because impersonal, when there prevails in practice and perhaps in theory the principle, “The people exist for the good of the State.”

Any of these varieties of false Patriotism is fundamentally *unjust*, fundamentally immoral. We come at last to consider what is Patriotism? Surely it is a love of country which desires that country’s best and highest good, moral good before material good. The Patriot would rather see his land *just* than great, respected and at peace, with justice and honour, rather than ruling over the world, if that rule have to be gained or kept by injustice. He looks to its true interests, he approaches the consideration of its affairs with a gravity, a sense of responsibility, a tendency to wise (not carping) criticism which may look unattractive on the surface. He may feel himself called upon to reprove, to judge, to condemn; his reproofs are faithful because they are the reproofs of a friend, but his countrymen may not always appreciate that.

Here comes in a point about Catholic loyalty. How often are Catholics considered lukewarm if not positively disloyal? Somehow we do not seem to dovetail into all the excellent arrangements of the modern State—we have often an irritating air of, “I do not quite agree with you.” We seem to go a long way on the popular road, but not quite far enough—we have a disconcerting way of refusing to

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go quite to the end. The fact is not that Catholics are disloyal, but that they are so appallingly loyal to their country's true interests. In the penal days, the gilded youth of the court, the shrewd obsequious statesmen, the bold buccaneers were the heroes, the builders of history ; but was their Patriotism as pure as that which burned in the broken, wasted, wretched forms which lay huddled up in damp, tomb-like cells, or jolted in agony to the triple gallows under the ban of High Treason, and to the sound of the insults of so many who called themselves loyal Englishmen ? In the golden days of the Florentine Republic, who was the truer Patriot—the great cultured ruler whose name has come down to posterity as *Il Magnifico*, or the friar, Savonarola, who mourned over the sins of his city and foresaw the “ flood of waters ” which was to overwhelm her ?

Here, as everywhere, we must cling to some fixed principles. Man as Man comes before the State ; the latter is necessary, as Aristotle says, in order that men may live “ a perfect and self-sufficing life,” but it must be remembered that, in the phrase of St. Thomas, “ The King (and we may substitute any polity other than monarchy) exists for the good of the people and not the people for the good of the King.”\* In his *Summa* the Angelic Doctor returns to the subject, and lays it down that a polity is unjust when ordained, not to the common good, but to the private good of the individual or body ruling. Man has his natural rights which take precedence of any demands the State may make upon him. To trample upon these, to exalt political law to the detriment of Natural Law is injustice, and to support any such regime is not Patriotism. Such State-tyranny may show itself in several ways ; in the sphere of religion it may take the Reformation form of *Cujus regio ejus religio*

\* De Regimine Principum.

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and trample upon conscience ; in secular life it may trample upon family life, interfere with parental rights, with private property, may exalt the few at the expense of the many. The love of country lies not in supporting or even acquiescing in such a system, but in opposing it. Again we turn to Aquinas : " Man is not ordained to the political commonwealth to the extent of all that he is and has." It is often said that love is blind, but, as a matter of fact, it is remarkably clear-sighted ; the man who loves his country will clearly see when the times are out of joint and may consider it his duty to point out that such is the case—still more so if he be a Christian and look even at politics (*mirabile dictu* !) *sub specie æternitatis*.

But a further difficulty arises. If these principles are to be pushed to their logical conclusion, if every man's liberty is to be respected, if no man's conscience (and consciences differ) is to be forced, if no man is to support that which he holds to be unjust, shall we not have hopeless confusion ? Where will be that unity which is strength, which is essential for the peace and preservation of a country ? May not men conscientiously believe that true Patriotism may be red Revolution ? In time of war what of the State if every man is to weigh every pro and con of the matters in dispute ?

Of course in practice we must find a golden mean. Often the greatest good of the greatest number is to be obtained by the willing sacrifice of an individual good. " It is expedient that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." The remedy lies in a great unselfishness, nay, a selfishness which is an essential of true Patriotism. There is much truth in the French dictum, *Le mieux est l'ennemi du Bien* ; to try to right things by a violent upheaval, however much in the right one may be, may cause more confusion and injustice in the end

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than to work more slowly and prudently. Again, though it may sound a little strange, it must be borne in mind that the rectitude required in the State, though high, falls short of that rectitude of the whole man required in the Christian dispensation in view of the world to come. The aim of civil government has been described as "the rational happiness of the perfect human community, whereof the civil legislature has the care and the happiness of the individuals, as they are members of such a community ; that they may live therein peaceably and justly, and with a sufficiency of goods for the preservation and comfort of this bodily life and with so much moral rectitude as is necessary for this external peace and happiness of the commonwealth and the continued preservation of human nature."\*

Obviously everyone cannot go into minute ethical details anent every act of the State. The majority have neither the leisure nor the equipment ; then it suffices that obedience be rendered to those in authority who should know ; theirs is the responsibility in such cases.

One asks, too, if a career of conquest be always necessarily wrong. Not always in theory, not invariably in practice, if the object be justice, not the gratification of ambition. Virgil hailed his country as having a divine right to conquer the world. As *Roma Immortalis*, her destiny was *parcere subjectis et debellare superbos*, in whose rule was to be healing for the nations. Such an ideal is not altogether extravagant : it is not the same as the one which makes a desolation and calls it peace.

The ideal is that complete justice should reign in civil life, even in political relations, that love of one's country and approval of her should be one and the same, that somehow the principles of sound morality

\* Suarez, *De Legibus*, III, xi, 7.

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should reign absolutely in high places, that the patriot should never be a voice crying in the wilderness for crooked ways to be made plain, but one who rejoices that they are so.

Could it be brought about, or is it, like Plato's ideal State, a pattern laid up in Heaven for gods or the children of gods, but not for the children of men? Much can be done by the spreading of *Truth*, by the inculcating of sound principles upon society, but does not the experience of ages seem to show that something else is needed, something august, external, above human passions, some sacrosanct authority to which the world may look for guidance in Patriotism, from which men may learn those sound principles without which the best intentions and acts are absolutely futile? Once upon a time the world would have answered, "Yes"—perhaps there may be such now, but it is necessary to lift up our eyes to the hills and to one in particular, which is a Rock.

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