

A21

I-A\9\4

National Mentalities of Europe

[The item consists of 5 pp. (1/2 legal size), the first a synopsis of a talk on characteristics of England, France, Italy, Germany, the next 4 on England and France. See TOC 20 (1983)].

[1]

1. Most rapidly if concrete problem. English hypocrites.
2. Exploration: people, foreign office.
3. Deeper explanation, no formula for life.
Constitution
Code of law
Universities, Aim of education.
Moral ideas, Cardinal virtue, Visit, Little boy.
Church of England, Unfinished universe
Anomalous, yet sincere and effective.
4. France: Goddess reason; Liberté, égalité, fraternité/
negro question
France, best prose; England, best poetry
Education: clarté française, laicism of schools
Religious indifference: First Comm., Amiens region
Seek ye first, economic determinism, Humanité Oeuvre
Poli
Patriotism: soldiers 1937 on way to Lourdes, reason
reaches beyond frontiers
5. Italy: nobleman in financial distress
14th 15th, rest of Europe barbarous, painters,
scientists
Today: Einstein, not only Riemann Gauss, Cruiser Austral
Polite: won't correct; Neapolitan newsboy; not recei
Vitt
Poor: Paris shops, French countryside, cooking, cross
Alp miniature shacks, rocky soil or unequipped, meat
on Frid only product sunshine, 45 million in Flor
Alabama
Not in swim: transplanting E democ, crooked gov, strikes
comfort: chesterfield in every flat; house 400 elec
wat
Time is money (Pian piano); roba nazionale;
Fasc., end comm revolt, dose of buck-you-up-o, Sturzo
Muss: Lenin's best pupil; 3 phases; "azione"
Radically unxtian, rights derived from state, force
decid
Wishful thinking: departure go & return indefinitely
Passivity: joke, hate Germans, take Osser secretly,
incurable individualism (marching)
New age, we are in on start, democ outworn idea, capit
dea [capitalism dead?]

- Sanctions: common cause, English popular experiment,
 Italians "Di qual pulpita predica Inghilterra"; union
 No more tell Italian they were right than Engl wrong
6. Germany: unlike E F, culture, then faith; when faith
 goes, then everything; no real second string
 Music: Bach Beethoven; Wagner (pagan myth) romantic
 gather em together, marching col., Germ Coll
 Inflation: creation of universal proletariat
 Technique of revolution:
 Cyclothemique, oratorial technique, brutality sexuality
 vigorous animal, unlimited nationalism
 Catholics: fervent resist persecution, youth lost,
 Becker, Grisar, Pelster (wrong but outsiders won't
 right it), Leiber (Hit Stal),
7. What is meaning of it all? Our heart is restless till it
 rest in Thee, broken cisterns, Xt has to be king Not
 pleasure but cross.

[2]

[On reverse, obviously an earlier beginning: It will be well to
 begin this brief discussion of the national characteristics of some
 European peoples with those most familiar to us]

It will serve to bring us with the greatest rapidity to the centre,
 the heart of the question before us, if we begin with a concrete problem
 in mutual understanding.

It is a commonplace that the peoples on the continent of Europe
 regard the English as incredible hypocrites, always taking the highest
 moral stand on issues, and, at the same time, always managing to secure
 their own interests with Machiavellian skill. I discussed the point a
 little over a year ago with an Englishman and he considered that an
 important factor in the creation of this impression lies in the
 difference between the people and the foreign office. The people are
 idealistic; the foreign office is a set of realistic experts. The
 idealism of the people leads in all directions; the foreign office acts
 as a censor, eliminating all that is not to England's real advantage.
 The net result is, as has been said, Christianity and six per cent, the
 luxury of a high moral tone for politicians and journalists, and, at the
 same time, the concrete benefits of knowing on which side one's bread is
 buttered, when one gets down to brass tacks.

There is perhaps something in this explanation, but I think it is
 stands on a rather superficial level, for it accounts neither for the
 moral idealism of the people nor for the ability of the foreign office to
 circumvent dangerous enthusiasms. Let us attempt then to penetrate more
 deeply than this merely mechanical opposition into the ethos of England.

I think you yourselves have a radical distrust of theory, of paper
 schemes, of abstract constructions applied rigorously and systematically
 to refractory material of human life. You will say that life is bigger
 than thought and thought is no more than a pale and partial reflection of
 the infinite variety and complexity of the real world. And on this
 ground you will refuse to pay any great attention to theories; you will
 rebuff the fanatic who tries to argue into acceptance, not by meeting him

on his own ground of abstract discussion, but by a global judgement to the effect that such schemes won't work out in practice.

Now this spontaneous grasp which you possess of the difference between theory and practice, this distrust of the speculative reason, and the consequent tendency to meet problems when they arise, to "muddle through", is, though you may not be aware of it, though perhaps you might be inclined to disown it, the English in you.

[3] You may object that this is merely "common sense"; I think I must answer that while it is "common sense" in English-speaking countries, it is much more apt to be regarded as "common nonsense" in the rest of the world.

However, before beginning to consider the rest of the world, let us observe how this sense of the Unfinished Universe, this grasp of the failure of mind to equate with reality, dominates the whole English scene. The British Constitution is that there is no constitution, no set of rules drawn up at one time to interfere with common sense, with practical judgement in its action at another time. British law is not a code, such as Theodosius and Justinian gave the dying empire of Rome, such as Napoleon gave the French, Benedict XV gave the Church, and the Fascists gave Italy; it is case-made law, the wisdom and prudence of a long series of judges giving expression to what each esteemed "British justice" "fair-play." The English Universities teach no doctrine; but they exercise the minds of their students on all doctrines. The English church embraces the communist Dean of Canterbury and the modernist Bishop of Birmingham, but it also includes ritualists who go to confession and reserve the Bl Sac; it includes pastors who believe in the infallibility of the Pope; it has its monks and nuns; and, though it owns the allegiance of but a dwindling fraction of the population, Again, morality in England stands under the cardinal virtue of being English; an American complained to me that he had accepted to an invitation to an English home and was all but driven crazy by the constant substitution by his hosts of "English" for "good" and "unenglish" for "bad". Or to take another illustration, which took the fancy of an Italian, an Englishwoman was travelling with her very young son, who, for some reason or other began to whimper: she did not tell him to be brave, to be manly, that crying is silly, that it does no good; she simply, [sic] You must not cry; you are a little English boy. Thus England is the soul of England; its traditions are its glory; its source of a spontaneous cohesion, of a singular strength, of a high moral tone, ill-defined, irreflective, admitting strange contradictions and anomalies, and yet very earnest, very sincere, and extraordinarily effective. We can only pray that it will see England through its present terrible trial.

[4] One has only to cross the channel to find oneself in a different world. The French revolution crowned Reason as a goddess. It set up the abstract principles of Liberté Egalité Fraternité as the human ideal. It gave definitive form and substance to a natural tendency of the Latin mind; and if that explosive movement of the end of the eighteenth century transformed the face of Europe, still more did it throw into relief and emphasize and corroborate the tendency to universalism in France. I recall a Frenchman taking me to task for the American attitude towards negroes: your Frenchman does not colour prejudice obfuscate his view of life; Tunis and Morocco have their representatives in the Chambre de Deputes; on the streets of Marseille no one thinks it odd, let alone intolerable, when a negro walks along arm in

arm with a white girl. Now, while I think there is considerable difference between the colour problem of the Southern states and the problem that France so easily resolves, it remains that the French are characterised by a singular capacity for the abstract view of things, a capacity that is multiplied by their educational system, that is evidenced by their endless publication of books that elsewhere could not find a market, that accounts for the endless division of their parties in Parliament. Let us consider two effects, religious indifference and the success of communist propaganda.

The Catholic faith is not unreasonable, but it stands above reason; one cannot demonstrate the Trinity as one can a theorem in Euclid. Now the exaltation of reason in the French revolution was a conscious rejection of the faith; the subsequent open cult of reason in schools and universities has involved a more or less deliberate warfare on Catholicism which in the law expelling religious from France about 1904 brought to a triumphant conclusion. [sic] France is thought of as a Catholic country: it is renowned for its saints and for its places of pilgrimage; I need only mention Lourdes and Lisieux. But by and large the Catholicism of France tends to be an outward form: the day of First Communion is regarded as a great moment in life, like birth, marriage and death; shops about Whitsuntide display First Communion suits for boys, special dresses for girls, special presents of chocolates for the great occasion; and this commercial exhibition is but a reflection of the great solemnities in church and in the home. But as a Parisian priest whose life work had been the organization throughout France of catechism classes preparatory to first Communion said to me: they learn their catechism just as the ancient boys and girls of ancient Rome learnt their mythology; it is a task conditional a festival [sic], and once the festival is over the catechism means nothing to them.

[5] To illustrate the point still further, one can take attendance at mass. I spent a year at Amiens along with 22 other priests, and each Sunday we used to scatter over the countryside for a radius of about twenty miles, each celebrating two and some three masses, in the churches that had no pastors. France lost about 10,000 priests in the last war. The average attendance at the masses we said was between 10 and 15 pious souls: the rest of the villagers simply did not care. Now I believe that the valley of the Somme, and, in general, the part of France devastated by the last war is very much below the average. Even so, it gives a very bad impression. With this religious indifference one can couple the low birth-rate of France, the lowest in the world; France has succeeded in keeping her population around the 40 million mark because of the vast influx of foreigners, of Italians in the south, of Poles on the farms, and Flemings into the heavy industries of the north.

On the other hand, there is the incredible success of communist and socialist propaganda. L'Humanité, a communist newspaper run from Russia, had a circulation of about 2 million, until it was suppressed at the beginning of the war. L'Oeuvre, the next worst, a very leftish socialist paper, had a circulation of a million and a half. It is quite easy to understand: eliminate the hope of another life and tell men to follow reason; their dissatisfaction with their prospects will make them revolutionaries; their untutored intellects will make them the dupes of the most violent and most fanatical of systems of thought and action.

The intellectualism of France has been her weakness, the anti-intellectualism of England has been her strength. Trip to Lourdes, soldiers, discussion, one or two stood up for the tricolore [end]