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An Opera Bouffe Plot

IF THERE is a librettist eager for a comic opera plot funnier and more fanciful far than anything his wildest imaginings are likely to conjure up, let us commend him to the assumedly serious arguments just now occupying much space on the editorial pages of many American newspapers and dealing with the indemnities demanded of Germany by the Allies.

One such article appears under the caption, "German Republic in Reality a Sham." Perhaps you have supposed that the emergence of the German Republic from the ruins of the Hohenzollern Empire was a natural and logical sequel of the decisive defeat of German imperialism at the end of a fifty-month war?

To the ordinary mind, the smashing of the Hindenburg line, the shattering of the German battalions, the utter economic exhaustion of the blockaded country and the complete undermining of the "war morale" of a population behind the lines were stern, cold facts. Recognition by that population of the true causes of woe, misery and disaster in the vaunting ambition and reckless arrogance of the imperial régime, might sufficiently account for the downfall of the empire, following so swiftly on the ignominious flight of the gilt-tingerbread emperor. When to these immediate and obvious reasons for the rise of a Social-Democratic Republic in Germany we join the big fact that for nearly thirty years the anti-imperialist Socialists had been the majority party in the Reichstag by the mandate of a popular vote, carrying on through all those years an active and effective propaganda in the press and on the platform, no difficulty should be found in accounting for a German Republic—that is, the prosaic mind unaccustomed to traveling in the iridescent paths of spectacular extravaganzas would find no difficulty.

Foolish delusion this, we are assured by the knowing writers who have been nourishing their mentalities on the jingo pabulum purveyed so generously by the Paris press. The present republic in Germany was merely "a ruse concocted for the undoing of the Allies" by poor Mr. Hohenzollern and his friends, Hindenburg and Ludendorff—actively aided and abetted by Socialists! It was never meant to be anything more than a "temporary makeshift" to tide over until "German intrigue and cunning" should be able, through shallow pretense of compliance with Mr. Wilson's demands, to outmaneuver the keen-witted diplomats of France, Britain and Italy—to say nothing of American diplomacy!

The German Republic, we are solemnly informed, was "faked" in order to fool the Allies into granting lenient reparation terms and to mask Germany's military activities, resources and man power. An army of millions, "every man a trained soldier" and supplied with complete and formidable fighting equipment, is ready to take the field "when the hour strikes."

Proof? Bless you, haven't the junkers already started a movement for the annexation of Austria? Are they not talking openly of the return of the Hohenzollern dynasty to the throne? And—most clinching argument of all—has not the return of the Hohenzollern to rule at Potsdam, as soon as the peace terms are settled, been predicted by Lady Nora Bentinck, niece of Count Bentinck who harbored the ex-kaiser at his castle of Amerongen for eighteen long and weary months?

Truly, the opera bouffe mind hits only the high places in its fantastic flights of imagination. It is exempt from such prosaic considerations as the effect on

THE DEARBORN INDEPENDENT

the German "will to war" of the actual toppling in the dust of the imperial idol with its head of gold and feet of clay.

To this order of mind, the utter exhaustion of Germany's energies and resources in the nearly five years' war orgy, involving the starvation of its women and children, are just "stage business," thrown in for effect. The actual loss of Alsace-Lorraine, Prussian Poland, the Saar Basin, the African colonies, the Shantung lease and the Pacific Islands—all these count for naught. Or perhaps, they are all a part of the "ruse" to fool the Allies, part of the dark, deep and designing plot of the cunning Germans to get out of paying their debts and instead to start all over again the ruction that, in addition to the losses named, killed off some three million of their best men, maimed and disabled as many more, reduced the population to starvation rations during four years, cost the country its industrial and commercial leadership and gave a lasting black eye to its pretense of ethical culture?

Are there no bounds to jingo credulity? Such wild and weird yarns seek vainly to perpetuate the war legend, picturing the Germans as satanic supermen or hopeless idiots. Let us return to normalcy!

The Men Behind the Press

THERE is something worth thinking about in a suggestion made by William J. H. Boetcker in the *Erie Review*. National safety may depend, he points out, on the big guns of our fortifications and our fleets, but even more on the men who handle those guns. The question, "Who handles the gun?" is of such importance that our government recognizes the necessity of putting none but Americans on guard or in charge of these guns.

Far more powerful, however, than all the big guns in the world, as a weapon for the defense and preservation of our democratic institutions, is the press. So Mr. Boetcker asks why this great bulwark of our peace and honor should not be as jealously guarded as are the guns from being controlled and directed by alien and possibly inimical interests? And he suggests that Congress should pass a law limiting controlling ownership of American publications to American citizens and requiring the writer of every book, and of every magazine or newspaper article, to sign it with his name and a statement of his nationality, so that readers may be able to make allowance for national bias or propaganda.

The Obstinate Eleven

DUKE perhaps to the ardent temperament associated with warm climate, when the Spaniard is a radical he is very, very radical. In the vivid phrase of pokerdom, he "goes the limit" in socialistic extremism. Spanish revolutionaries are not apt to be troubled by any very delicate scruples as to the use of bomb, torch and dagger in advancing "the cause." But a delegation of Spanish Socialists, recently returned from Moscow to Barcelona, frankly express themselves as "horrified" by the state of things they witnessed in Russia. They visited the country on the invitation of the Soviet Government with every expectation of being able to prove to their associates at home that the Russian experiment was such a success as amply to warrant affiliation with the Third Internationale. Instead, they found conditions of misery, tyranny and oppression beside which the worst of the evils of that monarchist and "bourgeoisie" rule which they had hitherto so fiercely denounced are the merest child's play.

Most of all, they seemed to have been astounded by the utter cynicism with which Lenin discarded any semblance of regard for the most elementary principles of that democracy which is the fond aspiration of the Spanish Socialists. The dictator, they report, offered as obvious explanation of the "delay" in transforming Russia into a happy and prosperous communistic commonwealth, the imperviousness of the peasants to Bolshevik arguments. The peasant class, he said, constitutes the very large majority of the population and they are constitutionally "non-proletarian," so that there is nothing to be done but to hold them in strict subjection virtually making slaves of them, until they are forced to change their minds and become good proletarians.

This period of necessary rule by a small and despotic minority is placed, by Lenin at forty years. Meanwhile, as Russia is not an industrial country, the "proletarian" minority has nothing but worthless paper money to offer the peasant majority in exchange for food produced in the sweat of their brows.

Lenin is a vivid reminder of the twelfth juror in the old story who blamed the failure to agree on the "obstinacy" of the remaining eleven good men and true.

The British-Russo Treaty

THE document signed by representatives of Great Britain on one side and of Soviet Russia on the other on March 16 is not called a treaty. It is diplomatically referred to as a "trade agreement." Substantially, we are told, it is the same as the draft taken from London to Moscow by Leonid Krassin, Soviet minister of trade and commerce, in January last. While its provisions deal chiefly with a resumption of trade between the two countries, the agreement is a compelling illustration of the far-reaching scope of all agreements in regard to international trade. So it is actually a treaty and one in which the clauses "incidental" to providing for trade resumption are probably those of chief importance.

Many people who have all along clearly recognized the perils of Bolshevism, and who have not hesitated to express horror at the mere suggestion that a British Government should grasp the "bloody hand" of the Bolshevik usurpers, will condemn the treaty as a gross surrender of principle and a deliberate sanction of terrorism and massacre. There is something to be said for this view, but it must also be admitted that the humbling of pride is not all on one side. In exchange for its virtual recognition of the *de facto* government of Russia, Britain has exacted certain substantial advantages for herself and for the rest of the world.

Under the treaty, Britain will in large measure placate both the radical labor element and the trading class. For the latter, it insures the first opportunity for profitable trade with a population of more than 100 millions. But it also secures the clearing of mines from the Baltic and approaches to Russia, the ending of the blockade on both sides, and pledges against its renewal. The Soviet Government is particularly bound to refrain from any encouragement of Asiatic peoples to action against British interests, especially in Asia-Minor, Persia, Afghanistan and India. As the spread of Bolshevik influence in the Near East and the Far East is regarded just now as one of the most serious menaces to world peace, this provision must be considered broadly as of much more than British national interest. So also the provisions for the renewal of postal and telegraphic communications.

For all the world, most decidedly, an advantage is gained in the treaty's provisions binding each party to refrain from hostile action or propaganda outside its own borders against the other's institutions, or giving assistance or encouragement to any such propaganda outside its own borders. It may be taken for granted that propaganda against British institutions includes propaganda against American institutions—against democratic institutions anywhere. At any rate, it opens the way for similar agreements with the United States, France and the Scandinavian countries, as well as with the Latin-American republics.

French opinion is said to regard the agreement as unworkable, in view of the present revolt in Russia and Russia's shortage of exportable stocks, and to be averse to entering into any similar agreement until Soviet Russia recognizes the old Czarist debts. But as the treaty would stand if the Soviet régime should be overthrown and experience has taught us that its early overthrow is problematical, Britain's example will be likely to commend itself to both France and the United States as time-saving. Lenin's cynically avowed disregard for the sanctity of promises and pledges was given by Mr. Wilson as sufficient reason for refusal to negotiate with his government. But in the present state of international ethics, perhaps self-interest is no inconsiderable guaranty of good faith. From the humane viewpoint, of course, the big thing made possible by the treaty is that it makes possible the feeding of millions of human beings now on the edge of starvation, probably averting a famine as appalling as that in China. With even an approach to economic rehabilitation, the Bolshevik horror will be most surely undermined.

Be Careful, Mr. President

RUMORS from Washington indicate that the head of a private detective agency may be considered for the job as chief and reorganizer of the combined secret service departments of the United States Government. President Harding would do well earnestly to consider all that this may mean. It is not fitting that the secrets of the United States Government should be put at the disposal of private detective agencies. No man should be entrusted with any part of a special agent's work until all his antecedents are fully known. It is to be hoped that President Harding, through haste or inappreciation of the importance of the post, will not make an appointment which can make itself felt hurtfully not only in every department of government but in every aspect of American life as well.