PRINCE'S ISLAND, in the Sea of Marmora, is perhaps a picturesque, but certainly a remote, spot. What, in theory, was the reason for its selection as a place where the delegates of all Russian Governments should meet and compose, or at least elucidate, their differences, we do not know: in practice it has the advantage that from there the Bolsheviks will not find it so easy as they would have found it from Paris to address astute appeals to the democracies of the world. That anything will come of the Russian assembly—even presuming that the Bolsheviks as well as the others attend it—we do not presume to hope. Those who are entitled to attend include representatives of the Kolchak Government in Siberia, of General Denikin, of M. Tschaikovsky at Archangel, of the Lithuanians, the Letts and the Estonians, and of the Bolsheviks, who control territories containing about half the total population of Russia in Europe and Asia. We have contended that the Bolshevists might—that, at least, it was worth while to discover whether they would—make a concordat with us whereunder they would purchase non-interference and the resumption of commercial relations at the price of honouring Russia's bills and abstaining from armed aggression; but we are not so rash as to hope that any agreement between them and their bitterest Russian enemies will be possible. If they attend the Marmora Conference they will do it merely for the sake of the possibilities of delay and propaganda that it may offer. We suppose that the scheme was a compromise resulting from one party wishing to negotiate with the Bolshevists and another protesting that they were unfit to speak to. The upshot is that the Peace Conference has shirked the Russian problem, and there is too much reason to fear that its attitude towards the Polish and German problems is marked by an equal lack of decision.

Assuming that it is genuine (a question about which no evidence is before us), the remarkable letter from the ex-Kaiser to the late Emperor Francis Joseph, published by the French committee of inquiry into the responsibility for war crimes, hangs an obviously heavy millstone round its author's neck. It had, indeed, been already established that the bulk of the atrocities committed in Belgium and France during 1914 were the result not of indiscipline but of policy—that they were done purposely, in order to terrify. We knew that many subsequent German war crimes had also been purposive—opus ducatibus, for instance. We knew, too, that under the Russian Army and State system such courses required, and must have had, the Kaiser's sanction; and we [knew] lastly, that this principle of committing atrocities in order to break down the enemy's moral was a part of the Russian war-theory, which its exponents were at no pains either to disguise or to apologise for. Nevertheless, the personal autobiographed eunuchism of the theory by William II. in a letter written to his principal Ally at the time when the events took place is a very material piece of evidence. What may strike some people almost more is the glistening, visualising way in which the letter refers to the intended horrors. There is a strain of criminal degeneracy about it, which matches, if it does not exceed, the strain in which some people are anticipating the writer's execution.

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A majority of States has now voted in favour of the federal prohibition amendment. America will therefore go dry (as a war measure) this year and permanently next year. All sorts of causes have contributed to this remarkable decision; there have been curious bargains between the supporters and opponents of prohibition and women's suffrage; there has been a growing belief that even moderate drinking impairs efficiency; in some States politicians have sought to buy the women's vote by supporting prohibition, and a large number of voters have voted against drink not...
Mr. W. H. Hudson's lovely Crystal Age, an age in which mankind dwells in a few widely separated patriarchal households, beautiful and long-lived, simple, infinitely wise, and in constant communion with the earth. But this is so far out of relation with anything that could reasonably be prophesied that it is rather, perhaps, a fairy-tale than a book about the future—one step further from reality than Morris's real "earthy paradise." It is like News from Nowhere, a story from which one rises with the gloom of daily life momentarily deepened.

What one might call the "middle future" is, of course, the happy hunting-ground of the crank, who imagines the most marvellous and the most diverting mechanical improvements. In one book, the memory of which I cherish, though not, alas, the memory of its title or its author, the hero is a great scientist, who, having produced a human being by chemical processes, announces his intention of this largely increasing the output, and is astonished (the author sympathetically astonished and hurt with him) when his reactionary fellow-citizens look on the project with disfavour. But all, mad or sane, are, curiously, almost unanimously in the opinion that applied science will continue in the future at its present rate of progress. This is not questioned by Mr. Wells (save in one instance) or Mr. Rousseau or Monsignor Benson in his two pictures of an Atheist and a Catholic future. (You pay your six shillings and have the opportunity of finding each alternative equally uninviting.) Certain items of "progress"—for example, moving pavements, gramophone newspapers, and legalised and organised suicide (sometimes called euthanasia)—frequently occur, and development on such lines, for good or evil, appears to be the common anticipation. Yet, I suppose, the reverse is at least possible. It is sketched in Mr. Wells's War in the Air, where the ravages of battle leave the whole world keeping pigs, without its heritage of science; but the description is not carried far enough. Much the same state is reached in Jack London's The Scarlet Plague, but here the population is reduced to, I think, one in thirty millions, and this should perhaps be classed as an "end of the race book" rather than as a vision of the middle future. Richard Jefferies did it more elaborately in After London by means of an obscure astronomical disaster which considerably altered the configuration of the earth; but, save for a few good passages in which he described wild nature resuming its supremacy over the garden-like English countryside, and an extraordinarily vivid picture of London deserted and become a pestilential swamp, he plunged the world so deep into a new Dark Age that he might just as well have been writing about the original Dark Ages. His characters were feudal barons, who fought one another with bows and arrows, catapults and battering rams; and except that they smoked clay pipes, grown in Devonshire, it is hard to see how they differ from their prototypes. What I should like to see is a book showing our present civilisation sinking gradually into decay, not hurried there by some single cataclysm, but rather by the dissolution of that state of the less satisfactory South American Republics and below it, from causes as much or as little explicable as those that withdrew genius from Athens, undermined the Roman Empire, and stopped the spirit of Gothic in medieval Europe. I can conceive several chains of events which might lead—plausibly enough at least for a novel—to such a result; for example, a balance between capital and labour, each determined to subdue the other, and neither quite strong enough to manage it. It is arguable that our science is too permanently secured in books ever to be quite lost, though, as Mr. Bellow has pointed out, there must have been a great wealth of Roman technical literature which has utterly disappeared. But this possibility is not strong enough to stand in the way of writing such a novel; and, if some ingenious author would give six months or so of his time to it, I should have a valuable piece to add to my collection. It is, in fact, one of the books which I should dearly like to see someone else write—but which I am damned if I write myself.

Edward Shanks.

FLAME AND SNOW

The bare branches rose against the grey sky.
Under them, newly fallen, snow shone to the eye.
Up the hill-slope, over the brow it shone,
Spreading an immaterial beauty to treat upon.
In the elbow of black boughs it clung, nested white,
And smooth below it slept in the solitude of its light.

It was deep to the knee in the hollow; there in a stump of wood
I struck my bill-hook, warm to the fingers' blood, and stood,
Pausing, and breathed and listened: all the air around
Was filled with busy strokes and ringing of clean sound,
And now and again a crack and a slow rending, to tell
When a tree heavily tottered and swift with a crash fell.

I smelt the woody smell of smoke from the fire, now
Beginning to spurt from frayed bracken and torn bough
In the lee of a drift, fed from our long morning toil
And sending smart to the eyes the smoke in a blue coil.
I lopped the twigs from a fresh-cut pole and tossed it aside
To the stakes heaped beyond me, and made a plunging stride,
And gathered twines of bramble and dead hazel sticks
And a faggot of twisted thorn with snow humped in the priecs.

And piled the smoulder high. Soon a blaze tore
Up through hissing boughs and shrivelling leaves, from a core
Of quivering crimson; soon the heat burst and revelled,
And apparitions of little airy flames dishevelled
Gleamed and vanished, a lost flight as if elfin wings,
Trembling aloft to the wild music that Fire sings
Dancing alive from nothing, loved and mad. And still
The snow, pale as a dream, slept on the old hill,
Softly fallen and strange. Which made me more to glow,
Beauty of young flames, or wonder of young snow?
Laurence Binyon.

GERMAN LITERARY CHRONICLE: 1914-1918

Just before the war—how remote it seems!—Mr. Martin Secker was publishing a complete English edition of the plays of Gerhart Hauptmann. Someone in Germany was returning the compliment by issuing a complete German edition of the plays of Bernard Shaw. These two instances are a proof of the fact that there was previous to August, 1914, more literary exchange between
England and Germany than a good many of us would now care to admit. Modern English literature in the original was, of course, chiefly through Tauschitz, much better known in Germany than German literature here—rightly so; but we managed, thanks to the enterprise of translators, publishers, and play-producers like Mr. Granville Barker and the Stage Society, to know a good deal about contemporary German poetry, drama, and novels. We need not now be ashamed—we have not enjoyed Wagner more during the war than ever before—and the novel called $Himmelsfahrt$ (Ascension) and a similar religious play entitled $Die Stimmung (The Voice)$ and a fragment of the $Rheingold (The Nibelungen)$, $Frere Buhle$, where Hauptmann with other important dramatists began his career; and the literarische Echo, the weissen Blatter, edited by the Alsatian poet, René Schickel—very favourably regarded by the Jingo—die Sturm, organ of the Expressionists, artists and poets; and the Aktion, organ of a now well-established group of young lyric poets, chief among whom stands Wilhelm Klemm. Wilhelm Herzog's literary and critical review, Das Forum, was suspended by the authorities for some time, but was allowed to reappear shortly before the recent changes in Germany.

There are three main characteristics of the German literature being produced by the younger men which should be noted. The first is a growing aversion from realism or naturalism, in part due, no doubt, to the increased influence of Georg Heym whose influence has been made; Hildebrandt, in many respects Georg's master, also seems to be inspiring much contemporary poetry. Secondly, one will note the preference of the younger poets for the dramatic form. And in this connection we must chronicle the foundation in Berlin, some months ago, of the society Junge Deutschland, under the presidency of Max Reinhardt, with the object of producing the works of the younger serious dramatists. Chief among these are Reinhard Göring—his non-patriotic Jutland battle play, Seegefecht (Sea-fight), the action of which takes place in the turret of a German cruiser, produced a painful impression when it was presented; Wilhelm Hasenecker, author of a remarkable neo-classical play, Antigone; Reinhard Sorge, one of Georg's most promising disciples until he fell on the Somme; Franz Werfel, a poet of the Whitmanian school; and Fritz von Unruh, an Ullian early in the war, whose war tragedy, Ein Geschlecht (A Race), a critic called "self-confession over militarism." The phrase might broadly be applied to the activities of most of the school; they represent the reaction—not too self-conscious to be programmatic—against the literary Jingoism of their elders.

Finally, in this hurried sketch, we must note the emergence of the German-Swiss poets and dramatists. One name, also, of a dramatist, is being acclaimed as that of a young man of great literary promise—Max Pulver, of whom, as of the new individual German-Swiss literary school, much might be said.

On the future of German literature as a whole it is impossible to prophesy. Political events and the exhaustion of the German people may hamper artistic achievement; on the other hand, the removal of a blighting political system may lead to a revival. The latter seems to be the greater probability. If the war has no, and a time of great artistic inspiration be in store for the Germans, it will still find a number of young poets and dramatists ready to carry on—it may be surpass—the work of the years before the war.

ALEC W. G. RANDALL.

* This was reviewed in The New Statesman for August 12th, 1916.