

Britain : Europe's last hope

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BRITAIN: EUROPE'S LAST HOPE.

By GONZAGUE DE REYNOLD.

Reprinted from "The Catholic Herald," 29/3/46.

Europe's hope to-day is Great Britain; but it is the last!

In point of fact, does Europe still exist?

When in 1941 I was excitedly and energetically embarking on my big work about the formation of Europe, a friend wrote in melancholy irony and said: "Europe will be dead before you finish. You will be able to frame your title page with a black border, put a cross above and R.I.P. below."

Actually, we Europeans should be the first to resign ourselves to our fate, for we are the ones primarily responsible for the situation. Our Continent, which by the way has never possessed the dimensions of a Continent, has finished its historical role. It has ceased to be the engine of the universal life. Europe no longer runs the game; it is only the stake.

It would be a very good thing if we got down seriously to the study, not merely economic and geographic, but first and foremost historic, of Europe, beginning with its origins, so that once and for all we may determine how it was shaped, what are its constants, its fundamental type, its essential organs and its sources of life. Better to remain ignorant than only to know things by halves. Montaigne already noted that half-knowledge is the cause of the errors which trouble the world.

One of the constants of European history is the struggle against Asiatic pressure — or, to be more precise, against the pressure coming directly or indirectly from Upper Asia, that immense geographic compartment which extends from the Baltic to the Behring Straits, covering half Europe and Asia.

Now once again Upper Asia has overflowed beyond its natural limits. It has broken through the centre of the West, reducing the rest of Europe to the status only of the bridgehead of the Anglo-Saxon and the Atlantic world.

This is interesting to note: Europe finds itself returning to the approximate dimensions to which it found itself reduced at the time when Charlemagne was going to Rome to be acclaimed and crowned as the Emperor of the West. At that moment Christianity, still young and fragile, was caught between the pincers which to the East and the North brought the pressure of the pagan Germans, the Slavs and the Upper Asiatics, and to the South and West, the advance of Islam. Europe was very close to being smashed and to disappearing.

One of the essential parts of this reduced Europe was Great Britain. The others were Gallo-Roman and Rhenish France and Italy, less what Byzantium still held. Italy had the Pope and the ideal of the Roman Empire, that is of Christianity; France had the men, the leaders; but the cradle of civilisation found itself then in the British Isles. From them the first Renaissance was launched.

It is false to say that the isolation of England is due to its being an island. It has been its Empire which has little by little drawn it away from Europe, not that little arm of sea which the Celts of pre-history, the Belgians of proto-history and the Germans of history never ceased to cross without difficulties. In reality England is one of the pivots of Europe. It is

there that the Mediterranean and the oceanic world, the ancient world and the barbaric world met together like two ships in a great harbour. But it would be impertinent to insist on what the experts of Anglo-Saxon history and civilisation know better than I.

The days of the European balance of power are accomplished. Britain has no longer to fear any European Power, since there is no longer any Power in a Europe reduced to impotence, and what impotence! On the contrary, Britain has everything to fear of a melting and dying Europe.

The idea of a European federation, that idea in regard to which English policy showed itself to be little sympathetic when Briand advocated it, is in this day an idea of salvation. It is the last hope of a Europe which can no longer threaten anyone but in which may still be saved the generative power of the only civilisation which has proved itself capable of being universally realised.

How can this be achieved?


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