

THE CRISIS OF
WALES

By SAUNDERS LEWIS

Translation by

R. O. F. WYNNE, of Garthwin

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A large number of those who read "Cwrs y Byd" by S. L. in "Y Faner" of July 2nd, 1947, have expressed the wish that an English version of it should be printed in pamphlet form. Mr. Saunders Lewis has kindly consented to this, and he has requested that any profit from its sale should be handed over to the Save Europe Fund of "Y Faner". Mr. R. O. F. Wynne, of Garthwin, is the translator.

EDITOR "Y FANER"

"Pessimistic thoughts": such is the heading of the editorial notes in the last number of the "Llenor". It is a better number than usual of this magazine. The article by Mr. Francis G. Payne is one of the best pieces of social analysis and literary criticism that have appeared for a long time and is a contribution of enduring value. But literature is not my proper subject here and so I turn to the Editor's Notes. He says:

The cause of these pessimistic thoughts is the consciousness of the great change that is coming over the life of Wales. In the first place, it seems to me that those parts of Wales which are the most populous are rapidly separating themselves from Welsh life. I refer to the industrial area of the South and to the northern sea-coast . . .

And then there is the matter of the Army Training Grounds. By now the national conference called to protest against the tyranny of the War Office will have taken place, but whatever is said and whatever resolution is passed, I fear this will make no impression on the authorities . . . In the long run "Wales doesn't

matter"—Wales doesn't count, and in spite of the noise that has been made, nothing will come of it.

I expect that this consciousness and this dejection are common in Wales today, especially among those who are no longer young. My aim now is to try to say some things that will give heart.

THE CIVILISATION OF THE WEST

I am not one to deny that the future of Welsh Wales is uncertain and that our Welsh society, our nation, is in peril. We have a symbol of that peril in our language. The effort to save Wales is one with the effort to save the Welsh language. And the fight is a daily one; and to all appearances we are not winning the day. Rather, we are losing the battle, and that day by day and week by week.

Yet now consider. Do not let us suppose that in our misfortunes we are exceptional and that it is our special destiny to disappear—"Wales doesn't matter". Not so at all. We are living in one of the most critical periods of the world's

history. The Christian and classical civilization that created the continent of Europe and all its nations is under the same pressure. Last week I wrote of this as follows in discussing the Marshall Plan for the countries of Europe: "It is more and more difficult to see how to reconcile freedom in the sense it is understood in Western Europe with modern industrialism." Look at Europe today and its culture and its spiritual life. Germany is sunk in misery, France and Italy are on the brink of anarchy or civil war. The "iron curtain" has descended on a number of the little nations of Eastern Europe, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Austria. And do you suppose that the spiritual life of England is healthy and that the future of culture is safe there? This is how Canon Demant described life there on the wireless a week ago:

Industrial towns spreading out and dead at their hearts; places to work in but not to live in; suburbs growing into towns and swallowing up the country; people living in factory-made boxes, not in homes; the idea of neighbourhood has vanished; the countryside is only land between town and town; town and country are corrupted together; concrete and bricks and cement encroach more and more upon the acres of the wheat; there is a greater dependence than ever on imports; people have lost the idea of work as a way of life; by way of compensation there is the need for the mass-produced entertainment of the picture houses and of commercialized amusements; families are moving without respite after work, without roots in any one place; and in order to

eat in England we are told it is necessary for us to make more and more metal goods and sell them overseas for food.

This is not civilization. "The idea of neighbourhood has vanished," and the idea of neighbourhood is essential for culture. Families moving about without respite, without roots in any one place—that is the plight of millions in Europe today, of the English also in their thousands and of the Welsh in the midlands of England. My point is this: that the experience of Wales is a normal experience, common to the greater part of the people of Europe and the majority of the traditional societies or nations of Europe.

THE LANGUAGE

But, you will say, at least the other languages continue as a connecting link between today and yesterday and perhaps between tomorrow and yesterday; but the Welsh language is dying. Here again I do not see that we have cause to pity ourselves so much, nor to judge that our plight is worse than that of other nations. Let us consider our privileges in this age: I am more than thankful that I have been born in a period when the splendour of the Welsh tongue and of Welsh literature has been re-discovered, that I have been born into the great inheritance that has been cleansed and purified by John Morris-Jones, and glorified anew by Gwynn Jones and Williams-Parry, and that still springs up and fructifies. Is it in peril? Italian and French are in peril. English has ceased, save in restricted circles, to be a pleasing tongue, having been corrupted through advertising and having lost

its standards. We do not know whether or not the Welsh language will perish with the twentieth century. But today it lives. If it is not respected as it should be, that is our fault and not the fault of fate or circumstance. There has been given to us as a treasure, and in one of the hours of its glory, a language fitted for our age and for all the social purposes of our age, and its dialects are yet full of hidden pearls. The perils that threaten it are one with the perils that threaten the cultural values and the most important relics of civilization in every part of Europe in these days. In the peril to the Welsh language, in its crisis, we are but experiencing the preciousness of the civilized life of Europe and the storms that threaten to shatter and to drown that civilization.

Without faith or confidence in the future of the language, we cannot go on to create in it, says the faint-hearted man of letters.

Where then will you turn? To what language? Rejoice that in your language, in the means of expression of your soul, you are taking part in the pain and peril of your age and epoch. We do not know at all whether there will be song or fine arts or any value set on spiritual things in the twenty-first century in Europe. But this insecurity, this perplexity, that is the test life is putting to us in our nationhood. To face this is life to us; to face this is to participate in the crisis of our whole civilization in this our day. Let us not grieve because of it nor break our hearts, because there has been no day like this our day. It is good to be alive today to defend civilization and to do a turn of work in the vineyard of Wales. It is a vineyard of Christian and classical Europe. It

is the same whirlwind that smites on its fence. It is not only from Welsh life that the majority of the population of Wales is estranged, but it is estranged from all the normal traditions of human life as that life was shaped in the garden of Christendom.

WALES DOESN'T COUNT

Let us turn for a while to the second complaint made by the editor of the "Llenor". He spoke truly of Welsh national conferences—"whatever resolution is passed it will make no impression whatever on the authorities". Only force of some sort, real force, impresses. That is the message of Arthur Koestler's latest book upon the problem of Palestine. And I read in the new number of "Y Fflam" the following paragraph on "Niebuhr and Pacifism" by the Reverend Harri Williams:

The sort of pacifism with which Niebuhr was most in sympathy was the pacifism of Ghandi. Ghandi recognised the need for using force in politics, but he would only use force without violence. He praised Ghandi for being too much of a political realist to believe it possible to dispense with force altogether in politics, and said that Ghandi's method is one of the most promising for raising accord and goodwill in a society, and the most suitable for use by an oppressed minority in its attempt to secure justice for itself . . .

I have never been a pacifist, but I have tried in my day to show the way to use force without violence in the cause of Wales, and I do not repent of it. I believe that if Welsh people want to do anything effec-

tive they must start out again upon this road. Not as we did at Penyberth ten years ago. But by methods just as costly and unpopular. Not by passing resolutions, Nor yet by standing before tribunals. But the task of Welsh political leaders will be to find out how to adapt the methods of Gandhi to the circumstances of Wales, bringing force without violence to the service of the spirit of Wales.

WHY WE DO NOT COUNT

When we say "Wales doesn't count", do we understand our own words? Their meaning is: the political leaders of Wales are not in earnest and there is no party in Wales that will venture anything against the strength of the state, the law and the police. Wales doesn't count—the Welsh are timid, their leaders and their parliamentary and religious representatives shrinking by nature. That is the meaning of the saying. It is not England that refuses to take account of Wales. But the English have learnt that a resolution to a Welshman means a thing to be passed, that is, to be put aside, not an act, nor the beginning of an act. It is not therefore the fault of the English Government that Wales doesn't count, but of weakness in the Welsh people. Cowardice in us. If the Welsh people were made sufficiently aware of this fact, perhaps a change would come. It is easy to rouse the workers of Wales to strike for

material advantage, for better wages or better working conditions. It is not so easy to stir up a strike or any effective action whatsoever in order to defend the spiritual interests of Wales. An outstanding illustration of this is to be found in the story of the campaign against the setting up of Butlin's camp in Llŷn. For months many were the protests against the project and dozens of resolutions were passed. A "Committee for the Defence of Llŷn" was set up with representatives from every party and sect. One could have supposed that the unity to stop the handing over of the camp to Butlin was thorough and effective. But Butlin went in in broad daylight and no one said boo or bo to him and he put Fwllheli in his pocket. To a land acting in earnest, to a Defence Committee that knew the meaning of defence, it would not have been difficult to use the methods of Gandhi to place costly difficulties and substantial troubles in Butlin's path. Wales—and the Welsh Nationalist Party also—must choose before long between resolution and resolutions. It is those people who devote themselves to resolutions who give themselves up to "pessimistic thoughts". Had we resolution we could laugh and rejoice more often, and Wales would count, and for a simple reason, namely that a few Welshmen had freed themselves from fear.

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