

# THE RED HYSTERIA

## An Editorial

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## The Red Hysteria

**I**N the middle of the Seventeenth Century there was a famous witchfinder, named Matthew Hopkins, who instituted raids and drives in the eastern countries of England for the purpose of discovering witches. His principal test was to throw the suspect into the river and find out if he floated. At last it occurred to some one to apply the test to Hopkins himself. He was thrown into the river. He floated. He was declared a wizard. And he was put to death. . . . There is nothing new about the Red Hysteria. Soon after James I ascended the throne of England a law was enacted which subjected witches to death on the first conviction, "even though they should have inflicted no injury upon their neighbors." (Lecky.) This law was passed when Coke was Attorney-General of England and Francis Bacon a member of Parliament. Twelve Bishops sat upon the commission to which it was referred. Sir Thomas Browne, author of *Religio Medici*, declared "those who denied the existence of witchcraft were not only infidels, but also by implication, atheists." Parlor Bolsheviks in other words. Selden "maintained that the law con-

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demning women to death for witchcraft was perfectly just, but that it was quite unnecessary to ascertain whether witchcraft was a possibility." The word of any federal agent was sufficient.

Nor is there anything novel about the current methods of curing those disorders which have reddish symptoms. The ancient Hindoos\* had an elaborate cure for jaundice which might be adopted by Mr. Palmer, Mr. Lusk, or Mr. Sweet. "The priest, in order to infuse the rosy hue of health into the sallow patient gave him water to sip which was mixed with the hair of a red bull." In those days yellow rather than red was the menacing color. "He poured water over the animal's back and made the sick man drink it; he seated him on the skin of a red bull and tied a piece of skin to him. Then in order to improve his color by thoroughly eradicating the yellow taint, he proceeded thus. He first daubed him from head to foot with a yellow porridge made of turmeric or curcuma (a yellow plant resembling the headlines of the New York Times and the editorials of the New York Tribune), set him on a bed, tied three yellow birds, to wit a parrot (symbolizing Presidential candidates); a thrush (symbolizing frightened householders), and a yellow wagtail (symbolizing Mr. Archibald Stevenson), by means of a yellow string to the foot of the bed; then pouring water over the patient, he marked off the yellow porridge, and with it no doubt the jaundice from him to the birds. After that, by way of giving a final bloom to his complexion, he took some hairs of a red bull, wrapped them in gold leaf, and glued them to the patient's skin." This was known as Hindooization.

Speaker Sweet should have no trouble then in finding precedents. He might look into the works of Cotton Mather and his colleague Parris. "They proclaimed the frequency of the crime; and being warmly supported by their brother divines (Bishop Burch), they succeeded in creating a panic through the whole country. A cimmission was issued. . . . The few who ventured to oppose the prosecutions were denounced

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\* See Frazier, Golden Bough. Vol. I.

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as Sadducees and infidels. Multitudes were thrown into prison, others fled (were deported?) from the country abandoning their property, and twenty-seven persons were executed."

"I have now completed my review of the history of witchcraft," writes Lecky. . . . "I have shown . . . that witchcraft resulted, not from isolated circumstances, but from modes of thought. . . . Arising amid the ignorance of an early civilization, it was quickened into an intenser life by a theological struggle which allied terrorism with credulity, and it declined under the influence of that great rationalistic movement which, since the Seventeenth Century, has been on all sides encroaching on theology."

That same rationalistic movement now begins to encroach upon those superstitions which for the last five years have in many persons done duty as politics. The events precipitated in New York by Speaker Sweet have given the movement a powerful impetus, but the most striking event is the meeting held by the Harvard Liberal Club in Boston on January twelfth.

Mr. Justice Holmes wrote to the meeting saying that "with effervescing opinions, as with the not yet forgotten champagnes, the quickest way to let them get flat is to let them exposed to the air." Professor Zechariah Chafee, Jr., of the Harvard Law School remarked that "the action taken against many of these men (the Reds), arrested and let out again has brought our government into hatred, ridicule and contempt on their part. We should imitate the courage of our ancestors. What are we afraid of? Have we not faith in our institutions and the common sense of our people? Cannot we trust the jury trial even in the case of aliens; why not admit these candidates for deportation to a judicial hearing? Let us rely on eternal American methods, and not on these secret and summary processes we have been having during the last few months." Mr. J. Randolph Coolidge told the audience not to "mind people calling you radical, even Red" but "to think carefully, clearly, dispassionately." The Rev. Dr. Samuel Crothers said that "I believe the time has come to speak with no uncertain

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sound in defence of persons who have been unjustly treated and it is time for us to have a general act of amnesty that will cover political offenses. It is time also to turn to the big problems of the time, and not be trying by cheap futilities to crush out the expression of honest thought. If a person were to speak directly to the American people just plain common sense, we could stop this miserable panic."

The business of talking plainly has been nobly and effectively begun by Judge George W. Anderson. Judge Anderson said:

"Many—perhaps most—of the agitators for the suppression of the so-called 'Red menace,' are, I observe, the same individuals, or class of forces' that in the years '17 and '18 were frightening the community to death about pro-German plots. I want to say something about the pro-German plots and their danger to America:

"I ought to know something about those plots. It was my duty to know as much as any man in New England could know. As United States Attorney from November, 1914, to October 15, 1917, I was charged with a large responsibility as to protecting the community from pro-German plots. In October, 1917, I went on the Interstate Commerce Commission; and was until the armistice in intimate personal association with the Attorney-General, and with the men charged with responsibility as to discovering, preventing, and punishing pro-German plots. What I now say, I say entirely on my own responsibility; but I say it after exchanging views with many others having analogous responsibilities during this war period. If in fact the pro-German plots were no adequate basis for public fear, and for legislative and official activities against the right of individual and social liberty, it is quite possible that the Red menace, promoted in large part by the same notoriety-seeking individuals and newspapers, ought not to frighten us to death. Now, I assert as my best judgment, grounded on the information that I can get, that more than ninety-nine per cent of the advertised and reported pro-German plots never existed. I think it is time that publicity was

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given to this view. I doubt the Red menace having more basis in fact than the pro-German peril. I assert the significant fact that many of the same persons and newspapers that for two years were faking pro-German plots are now promoting 'The Red Terror.' . . . I cannot say there will not be some bomb-thrower. A fraction of one per cent of the pro-German plots actually existed. There are Reds—probably there are dangerous Reds. But they are not half so dangerous as the prating pseudo-patriots who, under the guise of Americanism, are preaching murder, 'shooting-at-sunrise,' and to whom our church parlors and other public forums have hitherto been open. . . . The heresy-hunter has throughout history been one of the meanest of men. It is time that we had freedom of speech for the just contempt that every wholesome-minded citizen has and should have for the pretentious, noisy heresy-hunter of these hysterical times."

In support of what Judge Anderson has to say we suggest that a challenge be issued by the sane people of each community to their leading newspapers. They might challenge such papers as the Boston Transcript, the New York Times, the New York Tribune, the Washington Post and others of that class to an extended and careful examination of their files for the last five years. The Hun plots and Red plots announced by them might be listed in one column marked "liabilities"; the proofs and the recantations in another column marked "assets". Judge Anderson, on the basis of three years experience as United States Attorney says that the assets will constitute a fraction of one per cent of the liabilities. Are they perhaps five per cent or even thirty per cent? It would be interesting to know. When the percentage is approximately determined, it may be left to the common sense of America to decide what percentage of inaccuracy constitutes a tendency to lie.

For the root of our troubles today is lying, official lying, unofficial lying, deliberate lying and imitative lying. The people of this country begin to know that. The Supreme Council at Paris acknowledges it. All the hysterical, all the infinite and intricate intolerance

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of these days originates in the central lie about Russia, a lie made possible by the exploitation of the patriotic zeal of a people who tolerated censorship and propaganda in the interests of a righteous war with imperial Germany. That zeal has been fraudulently imposed upon to foment and sustain an unrighteous war against the Russian people. To preserve the infamous blockade against a people pleading for peace, to instigate a fratricidal war among a torn and disorganized people, a monstrous and gigantic propaganda has been foisted upon mankind, and has poisoned the springs of its charity. The Russian lie is the father of lies. For lie, damned lie, it has been. It was a lie that the people of Russia were calling for military intervention. It was a lie that they believed in Kolchak and Denikin. It was a lie that they did not prefer the Soviet government to anything offered them by the Allied generals and the monarchist cliques. It was a lie that they had nationalized their women. It was a lie that they had nationalized their children. It was a lie that they proposed to invade a peaceful Europe. It was a lie that we went to repatriate the Czecho-Slovaks. It was a lie that we remained at Archangel to guard stores. It was a lie that Soviet Russia declined the Prinkipos proposal. It was a lie that Soviet Russia has not offered peace with honor and with guarantees.

And because these lies were the base of a policy of lawless invasion, disgraceful intrigue, bloodshed, devastation and famine, they have had to be established by every device known to panic and credulity. As a result of that lie a nation, solid and imperturbable, has been wracked by persecution, by cowardice, by distrust. Its great problems are postponed; its great tasks not done; its responsibilities evaded, its house turned to bedlam, the humble oppressed, its ideals flouted, and the light that it held to the oppressed of mankind extinguished.

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## PRESS COMMENTS

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